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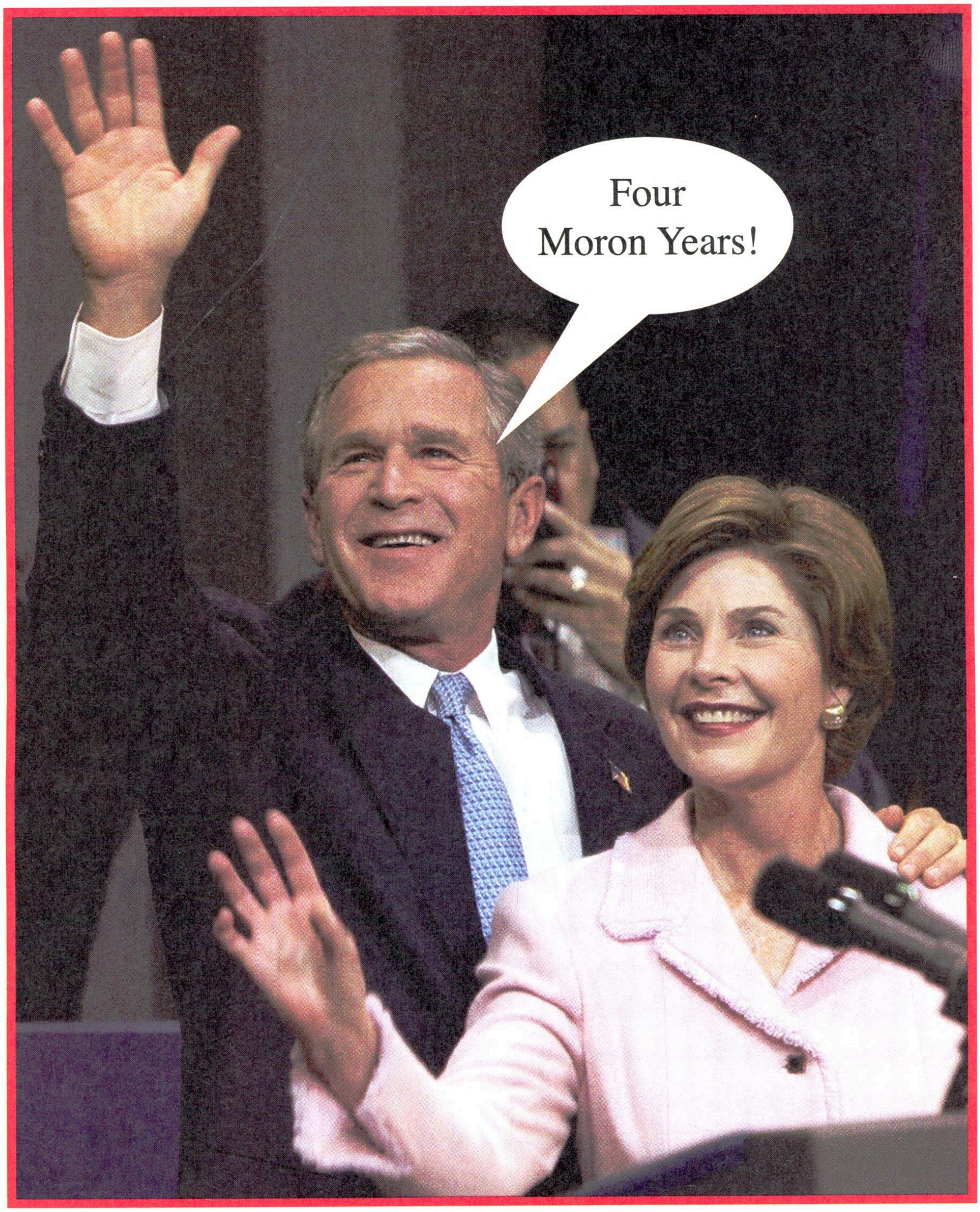
PRIVATE EYE

BUSH RE-ELECTED



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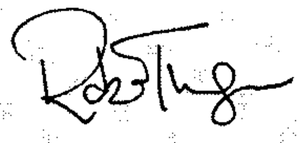
Yours faithfully



Robert Thomstrobes
(dictated in his absence by the proprietor, Lord Rupert Gnome, aka The Dirty Fibber)

EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. Tel: 020 7437 4017.
Fax: 020 7437 0705. Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
http://www.private-eye.co.uk

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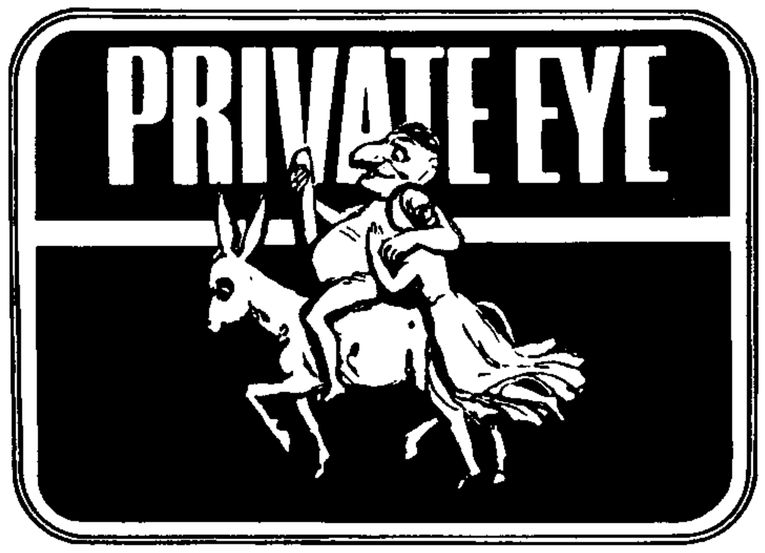


Compact edition

Bush; Arafat; arms for China: See News 4
Hackwatch on Mystic Mark Steyn 5
Why Prezza's angry with Milburn: HP Sauce 6
Rocco and a hard place: Brussels Sprouts 7
Dr B. Ching on rail vs road safety 10
The death of Harry Stanley 26

HOW fitting that the prime minister has appointed his chum Baroness Jay to the committee for standards in public life. The former cabinet minister knows all about the lucrative revolving door between ministerial jobs and the private sector.

Jay, who joined the committee on 1 November, works as senior political adviser to Currie & Brown, a construction firm chasing government private finance initiative (PFI) contracts. The firm's chairman Angus McLean announced her appointment before her elevation to the standards committee, saying that "as a former health minister and well-respected senior political figure" she would "enable Currie & Brown to explore new government sectors".

Jay describes her work as an "advisory contract on public/private sector business, particularly on the relevant health service developments". She previously advised Amey, another firm chasing government contracts; but left when the firm went bust following an accounting scandal and was taken over by a Spanish corporation.

Margaret Jay is close to Tony Blair, of course, having been one of three guardians of the "blind trust" which raised cash for wannabe prime minister when he was leader of the opposition.

FOR THE last five years the internal financial controls of British companies have been governed by something called the "Turnbull guidance", drawn up by a group of accountants and businessmen including Douglas Flint, finance director of HSBC bank since 1995.

Flint's work on financial controls culminated in his landmark 2003 report *Enhancing public confidence in financial reporting*, making him a natural choice when the DTI-backed Financial Reporting Council this summer wanted someone to review the Turnbull guidance to reassure the US authorities that British companies whose shares are traded in America are properly run.

The revelation in last month's CIA report on the pre-war Iraqi regime that HSBC, through its Jordanian branch, was the only western bank used by Saddam Hussein to channel sanctions-busting funds, must have been embarrassing for the man responsible for the HSBC's internal controls, including preventing the misuse use of its branches… the finance director Douglas Flint.

PS: HSBC is understood to be hastily reviewing its middle eastern operations.

WHILE the Royal Mail crisis continues – 270 post offices are threatened with closure (though conveniently most will be after the general election) – how are the fortunes of chairman Allan Leighton?

Observers were at first heartened to learn that busy Leighton had decided to resign from three of his other jobs. He will now no longer try to run the post office while also chairing lastminute.com and Cannons gyms, or while sitting on the board of Dyson cleaners (though he remains chairman of BHS, deputy chair of Selfridges and a director of BskyB).

However, it turns out he was only giving up his directorships so he could get involved in one bid for Leeds Football Club and another for Sainsbury's.

OUR story in the last *Eye* about Nicholas "Fatty" Soames MP has prompted a strange letter (see page 13) from the Framlington Second Dual Trust plc, of which Fatty is chairman, insisting that "the company does not have a shareholding in Berkeley as specified in your article".

Silly us. We were relying on last year's report and accounts of, er, the Framlington Second Dual Trust plc, which stated proudly that "the trust holds three house builders, Persimmon, Crest Nicholson and Berkeley Group". The investment manager's report specifically highlighted construction as one of Framlington's "favoured sectors" which benefited from "the strong housing market and buoyant consumer expenditure". The allure of housebuilders, it explained, is that "profits have been better than expectations and the companies provide dividend and cash flow growth, yet they trade on low valuations and high yields".

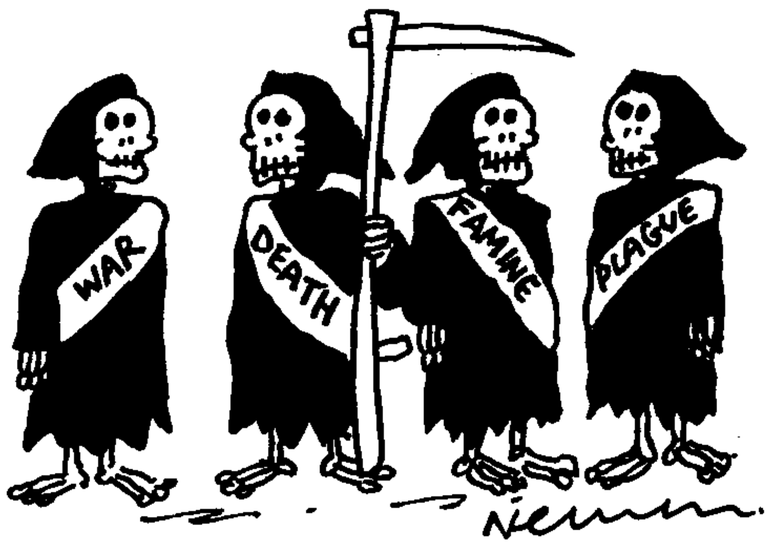
Framlington now seeks to downplay these holdings as insignificant bagatelles – and the one in Berkeley as non-existent. Shome mishtake, surely?

EIGHTEEN months after last year's tax credits fiasco in which payments to the needy were not made (see *Eyes passim*), the public is still no wiser about the full cost of the cock-up.

According to the national audit office's (NAO) recent report on the Inland Revenue (which was responsible for making making the tax credit payments), auditor-general Sir John Bourn "qualified" his opinion on the IR's latest annual report because the full cost of the errors has not been measured and the Revenue is still negotiating compensation from the pisspoor IT provider, EDS.

This was enough to deter Sir John from looking at the cause of this huge waste of public money and misery to thousands. He explained that: "The department and EDS told me that a structured process of confidential discussions on these matters was continuing as I concluded this report. In order not to prejudice these discussions I have not examined these matters further."

Just a few days later EDS had reason to thank the NAO for not exposing its role in the tax credits disaster – when the ministry of defence awarded the company a contract to build the Joint Personnel Administration payroll system for all the armed services. Squaddies might want to start checking their payslips a bit more carefully.



NEWS

SHORTLY before President George Bush asked Tony Blair to send Black Watch troops northwards in Iraq, the US president personally refused an offer of several hundred peacekeeping troops from Arab and Muslim countries.

He rejected the offer because, unlike British soldiers, the Arab troops insisted on working under UN rather than US command.

The plan for the Arab and Muslim soldiers, mustered and funded by Saudi Arabia specifically to help prepare for the Iraqi elections in January, was put forward in August. US secretary of state Colin Powell discussed the proposal at a press conference in Kuwait that month, making clear that the issue of UN control was central. "The Saudis thought it would be appropriate to make a separate reporting chain up to the UN officials," he said. He also suggested that while the Saudi-backed Muslim soldiers may have been additional troops, they could also have been a one-for-one substitution for Coalition forces. Had the Saudi plan been accepted, it might have been possible to bring a number of British soldiers home rather than drawing them into hostile northern Iraq.

Crown Prince Abdullah personally offered the troops to Bush in a phone call in July. Had the Saudi security force plan been accepted, the soldiers from Muslim nations would also have been directly involved in election security. .

BRITAIN'S self-assembly kit approach to evading the arms embargo on selling fighter jets to China continues unabated.

In *Eye* 1085 we noted how arms dealers were being given licences to export aircraft components to China despite an EU embargo on "military aircraft and helicopters, vessels of war, armoured fighting vehicles and other such weapons platforms".

Now, just published is the government's *Strategic Export Controls Report* for April to June 2004, which reveals that more £28m of arms exports were licensed to China in just those three months. Items UK firms have been granted permission to sell to China include: castings for military aero-engines, components for combat aircraft, components for ejector seats, components for military training aircraft, ejector seats, equipment for the use of ejector seats and the rather all-encompassing "general military aircraft components". It remains unlikely that these components are for anything other than, er, military aircraft.

Organisations such as Amnesty say the Chinese regime continues to abuse human rights, with public executions and people being arrested for reading the BBC's website.

THE negotiations taking place around Yasser Arafat's life support machine have centred as much on his personal wealth as on the succession to the Palestinian leadership.

The Arabic TV channel Al Jazeera last week estimated Arafat to be worth somewhere between $4.2bn and $6.5bn – rather better off than the average Palestinian who survives on an income of $2 a day. His economic adviser Muhammad Rashid is best placed to know how much of that is personal cash (a subject of great interest to his wife, Suha, currently maintaining a vigil at the €1,200 a night hotel Bristol in Paris) and how much belongs to the Palestinian treasury.

The series of bank accounts which Arafat maintained in Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg and the Cayman Islands, as well as his property holdings throughout Europe, will certainly take some unravelling.

Street Of Shame

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The Times has produced its last broadshite newspaper."

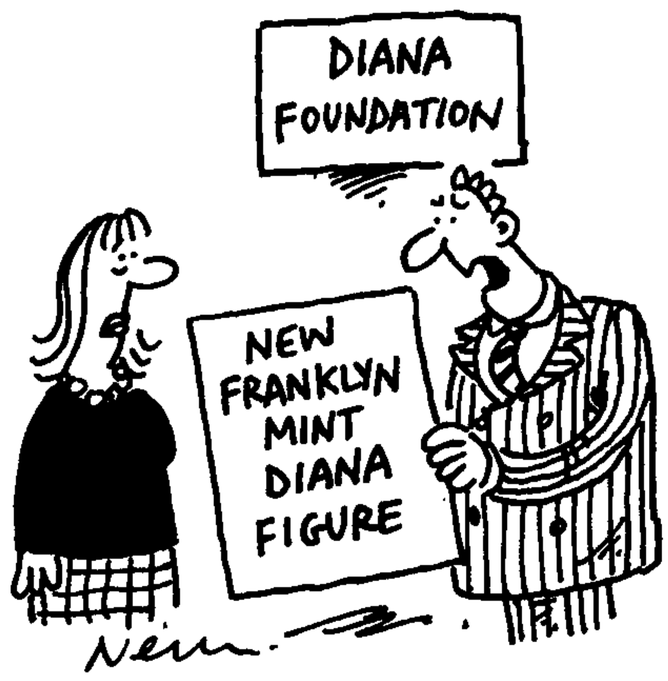
– Sky News, 30 October.

IT'S panic-stations at the *Sunday Times* as Inspector Knacker pursues his inquiries into Claire Newell, suspected of being the cabinet office mole who has supplied the paper with documents galore over the past year. And no one is in a bigger flap than political editor David "Crackers" Cracknell.

Crackers is immensely proud of having a law degree, and likes to use the phrase: "Speaking as a lawyer…" Yet despite his expertise, it seems never to have occurred to him while he was acting as the mole's "handler" that he might be breaking the law. Crackers and several colleagues – including hacks David Leppard and Robert Winnett, head of news Mark "Skippy" Skipworth and editor John Witherow – may now be prosecuted for aiding and abetting a breach of the official secrets act, and/or conspiring to procure a breach of the act. But what is really giving them nightmares is the possibility that they'll be charged instead with bribery or corruption.

Under the public bodies corrupt practices act 1889, as amended by the prevention of corruption acts (1906 and 1916), the "active or passive bribery" of any government employee is a criminal offence. The *Sunday Times* still maintains – though no one believes it – that no money was ever paid or offered to the mole. But even that isn't enough to get it off the hook, since the definition of bribery goes beyond mere cash to include "any gift, loan, fee, reward, *or advantage whatever*". For example, if the newspaper promised its mole an eventual staff job in the newsroom in return for leaking documents, that would count as an illegal inducement to act corruptly. The maximum penalty is seven years in jail or an unlimited fine – or both.

Although Gordon Brown and David Blunkett would be delighted to see the *Sunday Times* in the dock, at No 10 the prospect is causing consternation. With a general election looming, Blair is desperate not to upset Rupert Murdoch or his newspapers – and – threatening *Sunday Times* executives with seven years in the slammer and unlimited fines might upset the Dirty Digger very much indeed.



"It's £16 million in compensation"

WHO will succeed Lynda Lee-Potter as the *Daily Mail*'s Glenda Slagg? Until a few days ago it was assumed that Paul Dacre's recent hiring of Amanda Platell answered that question clearly enough. But now she has a rival.

To the horror and amazement of *Mail* hacks, pisspoor *Daily Telegraph* columnist Alice Thomson is letting it be known that she fancies the job. And Thomson has a powerful ally: her husband, *Mail* pundit Edward Heathcoat Amory, is a close friend of Lord Rothermere, with whom he goes on fishing holidays. If the *Mail*'s proprietor urges Dacre to give Thomson the mantle of Glenda, will the editor dare to disobey?

THE *Sun*'s decision to cut back on the amount of news it offers on its website and concentrate instead on its commercial possibilities backfired tastelessly on the day Margaret Hassan's kidnappers released a video of her pleading not to die like Ken Bigley.

Those who accessed the story on the Sun website were greeted by a still picture of the weeping aid worker – which promptly exploded in an animated shower of blood as part of a pop-up advertising campaign for a horror film promotion.

WHEN editor Martin Newland took over the *Daily Telegraph*, he was clear on the biggest change he wanted to make at the paper: "If I see one more picture of bikini clad girls… I'll be furious."

Last week, seeking to lure *Times* readers disgruntled by their paper's move to tabloid size, the *Tottygraph* published a free booklet giving details of its high-minded, serious broadsheet coverage. And what image graced the glossy pamphlet's cover, beneath the headline "Hello again, boys"? A picture of the underwear model Eva Herzigova reclining over what looks like a giant beachball in a very skimpy red bikini.

THE *Daily Mail* has been scathing about the recent performance of the Prudential, calling its demands for extra funds from shareholders "a huge mistake", a "botch" and predicting that "this bonfire is going to be hard to douse without a Guy Fawkes".

Meanwhile, advertisements in the paper have been offering a "FREE *Daily Mail* Guide to Savings, by Tony Hazell, Editor of 'Money Mail'", which promises to explain all the risks involved in stock market investment. The booklet, liberally branded with the *Daily Mail*'s logo, concludes with an exhortation to put your "lazy lump sum" in a "Pru Fund Investment Plan" – a fact which is not all that surprising, given that it is sponsored by and produced "in association with"… Prudential.

***OBSERVER* crime correspondent Tony Thompson has joined the new elite on his paper: the growing number of hacks who have been nicked by security forces.**

Last week Inspector Knacker knocked on Thompson's door – briefly, before removing it from its hinges – and detained him after finding three guns inside his sock drawer. Thompson, who has written exposés on the ease with which guns can be bought on the web, could be charged with firearm offences.

Other *Observer* scribblers who have come unstuck recently include media editor David Smith who had become besotted with a dishy Russian PR lady while on a Moscow freebie. He returned to consummate his passion but failed to make contact with his heart's desire and spent his time sending her love-sick emails from a Moscow airport internet café – thus missing his flight home. After buying a new ticket, he was promptly nicked by Russian security officers who thought two-tickets Smith was helping smuggle terrorists out of the country. After a friendly three-hour chat in a police cell, the matter was sorted out.

So far the hacks have earned just a ticking off; but Thompson might not be so lucky. Firearms charges are a serious business and a defence that he was following the example of idiots may be his only hope.

AT a political knees-up recently, *Times* hack Tom Baldwin ran into a phalanx of *Guardian* writers – Michael White, Polly Toynbee and Martin Kettle. He tried to resist temptation but couldn't.

"Mike," he cried. "When you phone the office and ask for Martin but Polly picks up the phone by mistake do you say 'Polly, put the Kettle on'?"

Did la Toynbee think this funny? No she did not.

LETTERS TO THE TIMES – WHAT YOU DIDN'T READ

SIX months ago, *Times* editor Robert Thomson said there was "no reason" to suppose that the paper wouldn't be publishing in both broadsheet and tabloid format in five years' time.

He also put his name to a series of full-page adverts stressing that "The *Times* is fully committed to offering both the broadsheet and the compact newspaper to its readers." As late as 29 October, a *Times* spokesman dismissed rumours that the broadsheet would be dropped within days as "nonsensical".

The very next day, the paper produced its last-ever broadsheet edition. Thomson announced the change in a gushing open letter to readers and a toe-curling editorial on how the new tabloid *Times* reflected "the quest for quality in contemporary Britain" more elegantly than the broadsheet, which "does not fit easily with [people's] hectic personal routines". He also claimed that the abolition of the broadsheet was a response to "popular demand".

Not so. Many readers loathed the new format but found they could simply no longer buy the broadsheet: newsagents who continued to sell it were strictly rationed, and complained that they couldn't meet the demand.

As part of its disinformation campaign over recent months, the *Times* operated a special website (www.timesbroadsheet.co.uk) whose purpose was to reassure readers that it was "not planning to phase out the traditional format". By an extraordinary coincidence, on the day the broadsheet was withdrawn an apparent technical problem on the site caused visitors to be greeted with a message saying "This site is currently unavailable. We apologise for the inconvenience. Please try later."

Last week the *Times* printed a few letters from readers about the change, some expressing mild regret. In fact, however, the paper has been deluged with furious letters to the editor, copies of which have been passed by disgruntled Wapping sources to the *Eye*. Here are just a few of the thousands of messages that weren't thought worthy of publication in the *Thunderer*'s own correspondence columns:

"Dear Sir, The cant which punctuated your farewells to the traditional shape of *The Times* was reason enough for me to seek change after 40 years of devotion… You may gain new, younger readers. They will prove to be fickle compared to those of us who face the future with a sense of betrayal."

"You talk of change in Saturday's editorial… Well, time for me to change also, as I'm now off to the *Daily Telegraph*."

"The useless piece written by Mr Thomson on page 2 of Saturday's *Times* does nothing to convince me that the compact edition is anything more than a tacky and useless attempt to imitate the *Sun* or *Daily Sport*. How long before you start a Page Three floozy?"

"In addition to the virtues you justly claim for *The Times* could have been added integrity. You have destroyed that by lying about a commitment to continuing to produce a broadsheet and the wretched compact."

"As for the broadsheet not 'fitting easily with their hectic personal routines', that is gobbledygook and sounds like tabloid journalism to me. Is that what we are in for from now on?"

"Downsizing and downgrading this great, historical broadsheet newspaper into a tabloid (not 'compact' as you euphemistically term it) is an act of vandalism on your part, as yet another great British institution is consigned to the rubbish heap of 'modernisation'… After 50 years I have cancelled my order for your wretched little paper, and I shall not be returning. Shame on you all."

"I believed you when you told me that my broadsheet edition would be available… As with most people, I think the best of editors until and unless they fail to reach even the lowest level of manners and common decency by which this country ticks. You have chosen to put yourself beneath that level."

"I recall that you announced a couple of months ago that *The Times* would be available in both formats for all your readers. Sir, you are a liar, and if the editor misinforms the readers how can we trust the content?… The dumbing down of Britain continues by two cheap Australian conmen [Rupert Murdoch and Robert Thomson]."

"Saturday's leader was a farrago of Blairite sophistry, straw-men arguments, half-truths and blarney… How dare you patronise and betray your readers like this?… I hope and expect that this shameful deceit will ultimately rank with Coca-Cola's change of formulation as a marketing disaster. In the meantime, damn your eyes."

J F Kentish (1931) I am still alive and travelling to remove parts of this truly wonderful world.

The Old Radleian

KISS-and-tell stories used to be so simple. Slapper romps with footballer/singer/ *EastEnders* star, slapper sells story to *News of the Screws*, slapper gets new car.

Then Max Clifford invented the concept of the kiss-and-don't-tell – formerly known as blackmail – with lapdancer Amy Barker receiving £15,000 to sign a confidentiality contract about her "night of passion" with the fat one out of Westlife (she went ahead and told all to the *People* anyway, receiving a third wad in libel damages from the singer after he denied the story in *heat* magazine).

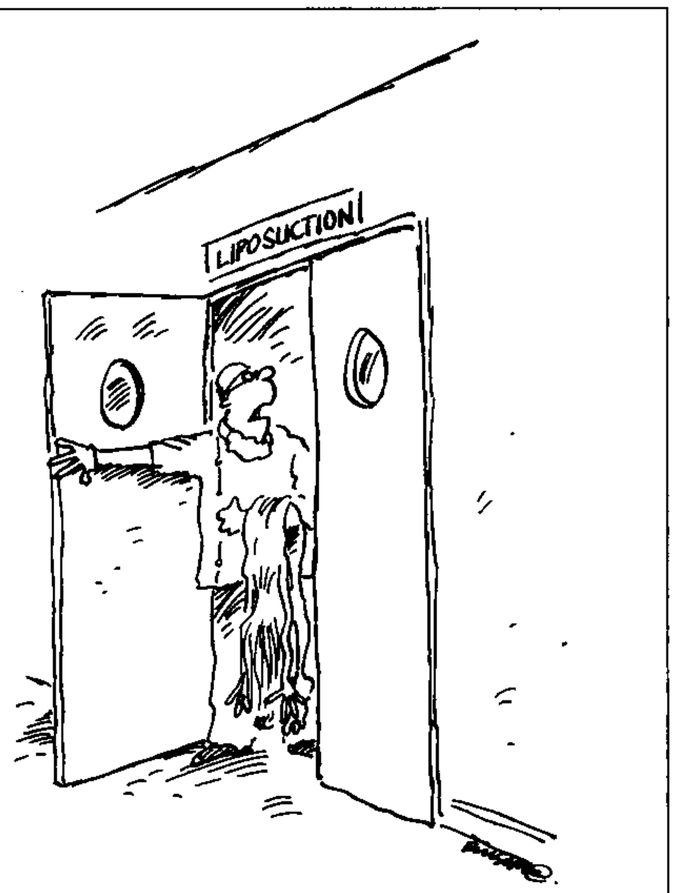
Now, however, it appears it is possible to have your hunk and, er, eat it. In May this year the *News of the World* paid model Lucie Clark £6,000 to reveal that *EastEnders* star Chris Parker was "a four-times-a-night superstud who's up for it any time anywhere". Last week, however, she banked another cheque from the *Sunday Mirror* after revealing that she had made the whole thing up at the actor's suggestion – and helpfully providing the papers with a set of receipts from News International to remind the company just how much they can now sue her for.

Murdoch's finest may, however, be too preoccupied flapping their chequebooks in a different direction, judging by the paper's coining of the best tabloid euphemism since "friend of Peter Mandelson": Parker was apparently uninterested in having sex with her because he was "more keen on going for solo runs on Hampstead Heath".

Two soaring windows mark each end of the nave.

To the east is the Ted Deum window, designed by John William Brown.

Liverpool Echo



"The off switch is on the blink again.."

HACKWATCH

Mystic Mark Steyn

IN HIS final *Spectator* column before the US presidential election, the ubiquitous Mark Steyn reported confidently that Bush would win. If the prediction proved wrong, Steyn added, he would pack in journalism forever.

The worst aspect of Bush's victory is surely the realisation that we have to endure four more years of Mark Steyn. But if dud predictions were grounds for retirement, he would long ago have pensioned himself off anyway. This is the hack who announced in January 2000 that Al Gore would win that year's presidential election – and then lurched in the opposite direction, announcing in October 2000 that "Al is heading for a total blow-out… Bush is on course to win big."

Though Mystic Mark changes many of his prophecies as often as he changes his socks, there's one hunch – not so much a prediction as a straightforward assertion – of which he has long been sure. "I said in the *Sunday Telegraph* a couple of weeks ago that Osama was 'deceased' and in the *Daily Telegraph* back in March that he was a few specks of DNA somewhere in the Hindu Kush," he wrote in the *Spectator* on 29 June 2002. "Everyone else seems to think he's alive and well." Steyn, with his top-level sources, knew better: "He's already stiff, he's six feet under, he's bin Laiden to rest, he's in paradise being pleasured by those 72 virgins and wondering if they're tittering about his shortcomings." (He has something of an obsession with the size of bin Laden's penis.)

Writing in Conrad Black's *New York Sun* on 5 August 2002, Steyn described Osama as "the old has-bin" who is "pushing up daisy-cutter bits in the Hindu Kush… we won't be seeing him on video again unless he's dancing with Fred Astaire in a new Dirt Devil commercial". On 8 March 2003 he reminded *Spectator* readers that Osama bin Laden was now "a few specks of DNA discreetly sprinkled in the rubble of Tora Bora". On 13 September 2003 he confirmed the diagnosis: "I said in these pages 15 months ago that he's dead, he's bin Laden to rest, he's pushing up daisy-cutters, and I'm sticking with that." Steyn's New Year predictions in the *Spectator* on 27 Dec 2003 included the following: "Osama bin Laden: he will continue to be dead throughout 2004."

On 24 April this year, Steyn chided the *Spectator* for an editorial which stated that Osama bin Laden "is no more likely to march triumphantly down the Mall than is a little green man from Mars". As he explained, "Well, no, Osama won't be going down the Mall, unless it's his surviving granules of DNA on a gun carriage." He returned to the subject in his *Irish Times* column on 27 Sept 2004, mocking Mo Mowlam's suggestion that Osama be invited to the negotiating table: "A difficult trick: what's left of the late Jihadist would fit in the salt cellar." The next day Steyn had a dig at "the late Osama bin Laden" in the *Daily Telegraph*.

On 25 October, a week before the presidential election, Steyn ridiculed John Kerry in the *Irish Times*. "As for this Bush-failed-to-get-bin-Laden business, two and a half years ago I declared that Osama was dead and he's never written to complain. There's no more evidence for his present existence than there is for the Loch Ness Monster, who at least does us the courtesy of showing up as an indistinct grey blur on a photograph every now and again. Osama is lying low because he's in no condition to get up."

Whoops! Days later Osama appeared in a recent video, looking remarkably unlike a few specks of DNA. "He's back, and complaining, rather petulantly," Steyn wrote in the *Irish Times* on 1 November. "So the 'has-bin' is alive and wellish, and I've received a fair amount of mail mocking my contention that he's kicked the burqa and is pushing up daisycutters." So what did the blundering hack have to say for himself? "On the matter of bin Laden," he complained, not at all petulantly, "I remain sceptical."

Now he tells us.

JOHN Prescott recently exploded over election coordinator Alan Milburn – Prezza barked that he "wasn't in the cabinet" and then recanted saying he meant Stephen Byers – but he isn't the only "new" Labourite narked by Milburn's increasingly heavy-handed tactics.

For once chancellor Gordon Brown and his old enemy education minister Charles Clarke are at one over Milburn. Both are furious at the latter's petulant decision to work to a new "30-minute rule". In future, said Milburn after a recent meeting with the prime minister, if a rebuttal of Tory policy pronouncements is not made within 30 minutes, he, Milburn, will jolly well do it himself.

MEANWHILE a furious Prescott will be looking for scapegoats following his humiliation in the north-east regional assembly referendum.

First in the queue for the Prezza vitriol will be those North East MPs who failed to show enough enthusiasm for his white elephant or didn't get out on the campaign trail. (Most decided Prezza's plan was a no-hoper as soon as the referendum was announced.)

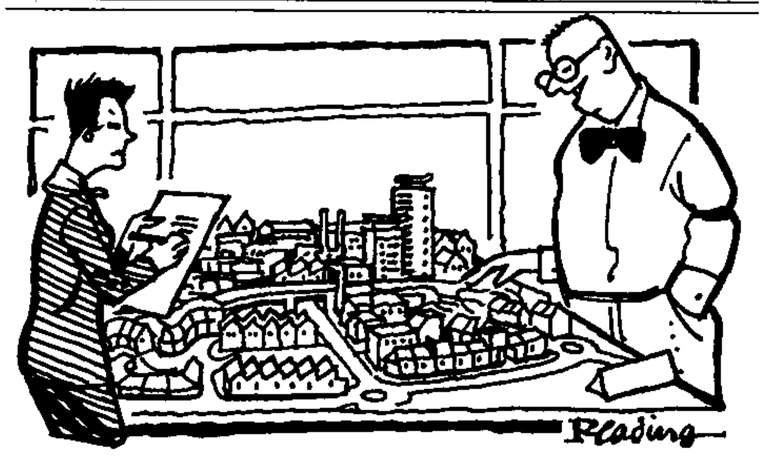
But Prezza is unlikely to blow his top with the man who really helped seal the assembly's fate: Tony Blair himself. When the Dear Leader made a morale-boosting tour of Newcastle calling for a "yes" vote the sound of popping corks at the "no" campaign headquarters became quite deafening.

JOHN PRESCOTT has reneged on a promise he made at the Labour conference in September to deliver a "level playing field" in financing improvements to council housing.

Currently money needed to bring local authority homes up to the government's "decent homes standard" is only made available if tenants vote for any of three forms of privatisation. Those who opt to stay under council control are punished by the withholding of such money.

Supporters of the "fourth option" of direct investment in council housing thought that when the deputy PM told the Labour conference that "public financing of housing doesn't treat local authorities on a level playing field and I want to see that changed and I *promised* to do that and look at an enquiry into it" (*sic*), he may have meant what he said.

Now he has decided that what he *actually* meant was that unless a critical conference motion of the government's handling of the issue was withdrawn, then no review or inquiry would take place. Prescott has written to Labour MP Austin Mitchell, who chairs the Defend Council Housing group of MPs, to tell him that, as the motion stayed in place, he "would be taking no further action in this matter". So no "level playing field" after all.



"Prescott says to add a tree somewhere, this is the South East after all"

AFTER irate fathers and hunt supporters breached security at the House of Commons, controls were supposed to have been tightened. But barely a month after new grey visitors passes were introduced, huge numbers of them appear to have gone missing.

When Lib Dem MP Norman Baker asked how many were unaccounted for and what steps were being taken to check visitors in and out of the palace of Westminster, Sir Archy Kirkwood, a member of the House of Commons commission, replied: "It is not the practice of the House of Commons Commission to publish details of the operation of security arrangements on the parliamentary estate."

He was clearly too embarrassed to give a straight answer… so the rumour that it might be as high as 350 still stands.

RUMOURS abound that health secretary John "the Hammer" Reid's industrious, on-message special adviser Richard Olzewski is spending more and more time in the West Coast of Scotland.

Rather than devote himself to investigating the health problems of deprived areas, however, it seems that Olzewski, a civil servant, is doing his best to garner nomination for the safe Labour seat of North Ayrshire and Arran.

This isn't the first time Olzewski has devoted much time (though not at taxpayers' expense, obviously) to finding a safe berth. He spent much of the early summer trying to win the Labour nomination in Birmingham Hodge Hill. He is now engaged in a slugging match with Amicus bruiser Danny Carrigan and Iain MacNicol of the GMB – so his training as "the Hammer's" sidekick should come in handy!

HOME SECRETARY David Blunkett's decision to hire a £66,000 head of marketing responsible for "positioning and promoting" ID cards before a bill has even been introduced to parliament has already caused a minor scandal.

Private Eye can reveal that the new PR supremo will be seconded from a private company for a year and receive a civil service salary before returning to the private sector. There is a strong possibility that he or she will come from one of those firms that is itself bidding for work on the ID card scheme.

The home office has outsourced recruitment of the PR boss to a body called the Whitehall & Industry Group (WIG), which aims to foster contacts between business and the civil service. It is funded by, among others, Atos Origin, which already supplies the home office with "biometric technology" for ID card trials. WIG also receives funds from other firms likely to bid on the scheme, including Deloitte, Accenture, Capita, EDS, Fujitsu and Siemens.

Blunkett's ID card scheme team already has three secondees (one from Deloitte) and six external consultants.

POOR Ed Balls, Gordon Brown's pointy-headed former adviser.

No sooner had he been picked to fight the old mining seat of Normanton, West Yorkshire, than the boundary commission struck. It is likely to recommend abolition of the Normanton constituency after the next election.

This means Balls, a likely winner, will either have to find yet another seat or do a job share with wife Yvette in nearby Pontefract.

CONGRATULATIONS to Mike Rake, senior UK partner and worldwide chairman of accountants KPMG.

Mr Rake has just been rewarded for his campaign to restore integrity to the accountancy profession with the chairmanship of Business in the Community (BtC), the government-backed body that allows large businesses to appear socially responsible. (BtC members commit to "integrate responsible business practice throughout their business".)

This honour may prompt wry smiles from hundreds of KPMG employees and pensioners whose futures are looking less than certain as a result of Rake's "business practice". As reported in *Eye* 1112, the firm recently lost a high court challenge against its decision not to fund a huge shortfall in the staff pension fund. Saint Mike has now announced an appeal against the decision. Former partners at the firm, who are clearly too old to understand modern corporate social responsibility, described the challenge as "greedy and dishonourable".

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE decision by incoming European commission president Jose Manuel Barroso to drop Italian Catholic Rocco Buttiglione as justice and home affairs commissioner was hailed as a great victory for Euro MEPs who had threatened to vote down Barroso's entire list of proposed commissioners.

They felt that Buttiglione's views – that women should stay in the kitchen and that homosexuality is a sin – didn't chime with the proposed role safeguarding civil liberties and gay rights in the European Union.

Quick to claim praise for his own role in the MEPs' campaign to humble the commission president (Barroso withdrew his list of candidates rather than be humiliated in a vote) was the leader of the British Euro Labour MEPs, Gary Titley.

But Titley's stance was news to most of his colleagues, who had seen their brave leader prevaricate on television the night before the planned vote, saying that "no decision had yet been made".

In fact behind the scenes and on the advice of the government Titley had been urging colleagues to vote "yes" to Barroso's list of new commissioners so as not to disrupt the whole process. Meanwhile another staunch defender of gay rights, new trade commissioner Peter Mandelson, attended a meeting of the Socialist Group and accused furious MEPs of being "tribal and infantile" in their opposition to the gay-hating Buttiglione.

THE European Commission wants to give the EU cops at Europol the right to access giant databases of individual bank accounts – while the European Union's own 200,000 bank accounts remain unaudited.

The proposals, intended to give Europol a role in fighting financial fraud, were published in an EU working paper in June and repeated by Europol at a tax crime conference in Prague last month. Delegates were told that the EU will support the establishment of central registers of bank accounts, as exist already in France and Germany.

Meanwhile the UK's serious fraud office (SFO) is deciding whether to investigate the European Commission, based on evidence presented by EU whistleblower Marta Andreasen, the former chief accountant who was sacked after claiming that corruption and misuse of public funds were rife within the commission.

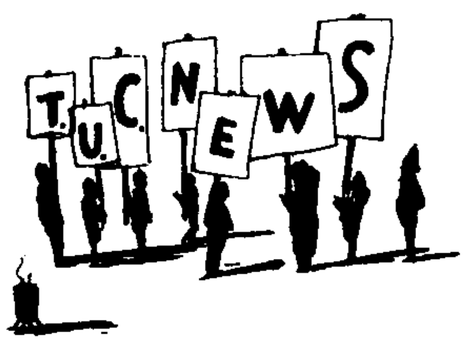
The documents she has handed to the SFO show that the commission has 200,000 accounts in 45 different banks. The EU court of auditors has refused to sign off the budget every year since 1994 because the accounts are so riddled with errors or are unverifiable.

JUST FANCY THAT!

WHAT an honour for the winners of this year's Green Apple business awards. Their efforts at environmental best practice have been rewarded with a trophy presented at the House of Commons by... Carole Caplin.

Last year's winners received their prizes from trade secretary Patricia Hewitt, so getting a gong from the prime minister's wife's life coach seems a poor show by organisers The Green Organisation.

Still, membership of the organisation costs £250 and its list of benefits is headed by "media publicity", "free editorial space" and a pretty green logo, rather than anything actually useful to the environment. So perhaps the makeover queen is an appropriate hostess after all.



WORKERS at Asda's distribution centre in Washington, Tyne and Wear, have voted against union recognition after bosses managed the unlikely feat of persuading them they'd be better off not having a union to represent them. But then the union in question was the GMB.

Asda's parent company is the union-hating US supermarket giant Wal-Mart, America's biggest single employer, which lent its considerable expertise to Asda bosses who were keen to fight off the recognition bid. Asda launched a hard-hitting propaganda campaign focusing on the excesses of the GMB and its officials. For example:

Claim: *"You're better off with the GMB".*

Fact: *Former GMB Scottish general-secretary Robert Parker (Eyes passim) certainly appeared to be well off. "Bolly" Parker drove a £25,000 Mercedes, racked up £2,760 at restaurants in a three-month period and spent £1,400 in restaurants during four days of the union's conference in Brighton.*

Claim: *"The GMB keeps membership costs as low as possible".*

Fact: *Last year the GMB received £43m in membership fees but managed to spend £61m; 71 percent of this went on "administrative expenses".*

The law says union recognition must be granted in any workplace where 40 percent of those eligible vote in favour. But in Washington, on a 75 percent turnout, 229 were against joining a union and 206 in favour – just under 36 percent, four percent short of the target.

Game, set and match to Wal-Mart – and some serious soul-searching for the GMB.

'Blackleg'

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

"Once we get round-the-clock drinking, all this will sort itself out"

In The Courts

WHAT does it say about the state of Britain's jails that a recovering addict felt compelled to abscond from prison because of the tempting availability of too much alcohol and drugs inside his prison?

A 34-year-old inmate at Leyhill open prison in Gloucestershire, who had been jailed for drug-related burglaries, asked to be moved because the jail, he said, was awash with drugs. When his request was refused, he did a bunk. He stole a car and was at large for a day.

Perhaps aware of the prison's reputation for drugs – random testing recently revealed that *half* of all inmates are on drugs – North Avon magistrates were sympathetic to his plight. They sentenced him to one month for escaping and one for taking the car, both to be served concurrent to his two-year term for burglary. In other words he doesn't have to serve a day longer than his original sentence.

NATIONAL (IN)SECURITY

CONTROVERSY looms over QinetiQ, the defence research company formed in 2002 when the ministry of defence privatised the Defence Evaluation and Research Authority (DERA).

The MoD allowed the Carlyle Group (whose European operations are run by former Tory prime minister John Major), to buy a 33 percent stake in the new venture (see Eyes passim), giving Carlyle some management control. Today, the company is preparing for stock-market flotation; and as the Observer recently reported, a former QinetiQ contractor has written to the MoD warning that under QinetiQ's new private sector status, there is a real danger that defence experts could hawk their wares, previously kept under national security wrappers, to the highest bidder on the international market.

The Eye has seen the letter and it makes very interesting reading: "QinetiQ is the custodian of vital military and defence secrets, knowledge held by QinetiQ has a fundamental impact on how Britain tackles the threat of terror. This information in the wrong hands could spell disaster for Britain and other countries. The motives for creating QinetiQ were financial; money will determine what happens next to QinetiQ if some urgent action is not taken to reclaim our national security. Questions that need to be answered are: how much did the Carlyle Group pay for their share in QinetiQ? How much is that share worth now? Who controls the Carlyle Group? What will the staff and executives of QinetiQ receive from a successful flotation?

"My fears are not fanciful. There are those within QinetiQ that are very disgruntled and aggrieved by the way they have been treated by the Government, even the incentive of a 'fat cheque' at flotation is not enough to placate some. These scientists and engineers have intimate knowledge of Top Secret government projects.

"I recently alerted QinetiQ to the fact that one of its employees had contacted the defence laboratories of a Far Eastern country and said they were thinking of leaving QinetiQ and setting up their own company with others and offered their services in an extremely sensitive area. QinetiQ have got rid of this person but the problem remains. I have other reasons to severely mistrust the management of QinetiQ."

The contractor who wrote to the MoD told the Eye Qinetiq had drawn up the severance terms of the employee involved in such a way as to prevent any public disclosure of the matter. He has also contacted the police to ensure Special Branch look into it.

FE NEWZ

THOSE who prefer staying indoors to rowdy PE lessons could now qualify as sports coaches from the comfort of their computers as part of the latest free online lifelong learning wheeze from the Learning and Skills Council.

Vision2Learn courses are mainly taught through online lessons, although everyone registering is assigned to their nearby FE college and appointed a tutor to help with problems and mark coursework assessments via email. Those who complete the courses can go into the colleges to sit a multiple-choice exam.

Essential Sports Coaching Skills is a 90-hour course which should take around six months to complete and which leads to an NCFE level two in sports coaching. Not all the courses are entirely daft. Many people will undoubtedly benefit from learning IT skills and personal money management via their computers. However, Vision2Learn also offers online courses in "Call Centre Skills for Career Success", a 60-hour course to improve your telesales skills, without, er, actually having to speak to anyone.

And a 120-hour course in "Emotional Intelligence" offers to teach advanced personal communication skills. An NCFE level three certificate in "Personal Effectiveness at Work" is available to those who learn and demonstrate human empathy skills through their keyboards.

Down On The Farm

MORE than once in recent months junior agriculture and fisheries minister Ben Bradshaw has been badly caught out by his Tory opposite number, Owen Paterson, and shown that he is more than the equal of his predecessors in attempting to bluster his way out of trouble by blatant disregard for the truth.

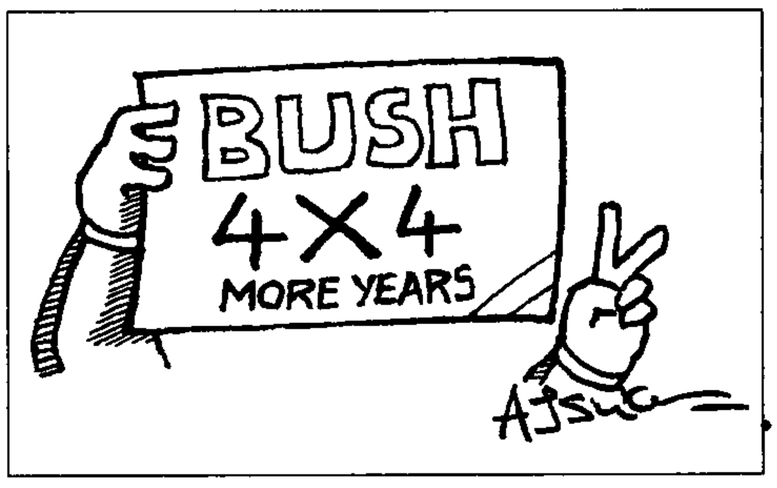
Most recently Paterson pulled off of a coup by going out on a Fleetwood trawler to witness its skipper demonstrating how, under European Union rules on mesh-sizes, it was impossible not to catch huge numbers of under-size plaice which must then be dumped dead back into the Irish Sea.

When this was prominently reported, Bradshaw was very embarrassed because these disastrously ill-conceived rules on mesh sizes had been laid down by Brussels in the name of "conservation" and there was nothing he could do to change them.

When Paterson then reported on the scandal in Fishing News, Bradshaw wrote a long and sanctimonious reply, omitting Paterson's name and boasting that the trawler in question had only been carrying out this experiment as part of a scientific research exercise organised by Defra and funded by the EU.

There was not a word of truth in this claim. The trip had been laid on, at his own expense, by a Fleetwood skipper who was so outraged at the lunacy of the EU rules that he simply wished to show the world how obscene were their inevitable results. Rather than acknowledge the problem, Bradshaw simply tried to wriggle off the hook by indulging in yet more embroideries of the truth – of the kind at which Defra ministers and their officials are now so practised it seems they can do little else.

'Muckspreader'



ITV

American Election 2004 (All channels)

CROATIAN state television, according to reports, had a very bad American election night. The reporter on the ground in Washington declared that the Democrat challenger had just won Florida and Ohio and therefore was heading for the White House. To compound the problem, she referred to her declared winner as "Senator Kennedy" throughout, becoming abusive to colleagues who queried her intelligence.

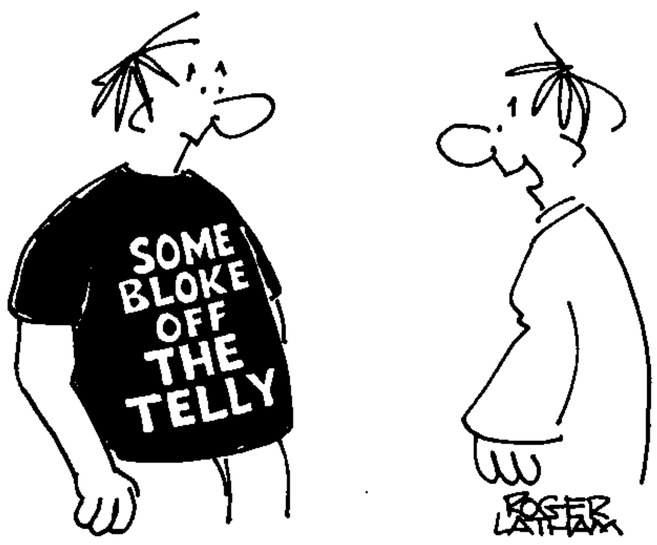
British and American broadcasters will have chortled at the stories of this fiasco but the stumbles in their own coverage, though more subtle, were still considerable.

All the Decision 2004 coverage, in the US and the UK, was driven by a terror of prediction. After the inaccurate exit polls last time – and the cock-up in which Florida was first called for Gore then switched to Bush – editors had taken a pledge to be circumspect. For the first time in living memory, none of the programmes began by announcing a probable winner. But, though this caution was sensible in theory, it led to several problems. The first was that, though they weren't passing on the news to viewers, the broadcasters privately knew of the exit polls suggesting a handsome Kerry victory and inevitably communicated it through nuance.

NBC news kept commenting that "the President looked subdued" when he went to vote. The BBC, going in close on Laura Bush squeezing her husband's hand, suggested that the gesture was "touching and also, perhaps, telling". John Simpson, on *Newsnight*, noted that Republican spin-doctors had stopped briefing the press, which was highly unusual.

Even more tellingly, John Kerry's daughters, beaming gleefully, appeared across the networks, just forcing out through their smiles the words that it was too early to know what was happening. So, although everyone kept stressing that they weren't predicting anything, any half-alert viewer knew exactly what television's prophesy of the result was. Anyone going to bed before 2.30am would have expected a Kerry presidency.

This problem was exacerbated by the fact that the broadcasters' nervousness about directly calling the result then led them



"Aren't you some bloke off the telly?

to ignore evidence directly contradicting the exit polls. Running tallies of the actual vote-counting, fed directly to the US networks and displayed in graphic banners on the screen, showed from early on that Bush had big leads in most of the swing states. But, burned four years ago, the network anchors sitting above this information continued to insist that these states were "too close to call".

The final difficulty is that if a results programme denies itself predicting the result – and the actual outcome is delayed by high turn-out – the show has to do something else while it waits. At 3.30am, the BBC screened a rambling interview with Loyd Grossman at the American embassy's election party. All the networks in both countries were reduced to such desperate filling.

"I'm told by close aides that the President isn't glued to the TV coverage just yet," an NBC White House correspondent reported in the early hours (surely one of Bush's more sensible decisions).

The most embarrassed channel will be ITV, where, with no significant results yet in, Bob Worcester of MORI theatrically consulted his watch and said: "At 20 minutes to two, my call is President Kerry." The other two panellists, until then predicting a Bush victory, immediately fell into line, deferring to his greater psephological knowledge. But Worcester was simply reacting to rumours of exit polls. This cock-up dramatically illustrates the central flaw of election night television.

The most impressive network was NBC which, terrified of exit polls after last time, had opted for asking a series of general cultural questions. One of these revealed that 22 percent cited "moral values" as the major factor in selecting a candidate: this turned out to be the key to the result. The same questioning exercise discovered that young people were not voting in greater numbers than the 2000 poll: another hint Kerry could not win. This analysis of the general temperature of the electorate (also impressively used by CNN) is clearly the alternative to exit-polling and result prediction and British broadcasters would do well to follow it next spring.

Even so, with the terrible discrediting of conventional opinion polling, election telly is in trouble. There's a parallel with football broadcasting. Originally coverage of the FA Cup final began at about 9am on the Saturday morning but, as it was realised that things only became interesting about an hour before kick-off, the transmission was progressively trimmed back to concentrate on the match. The lesson for political television is the same: less prediction, more reporting, fewer pundits, just results. The election won by the Christian right showed that opinion polls don't have a prayer.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: A pain in the muscles or bones of the lower legs, often suffered by sportsmen is known as Shin...?
Contestant: ...dler's List.
Robinson: In Germany, the Burgermeister runs what: the local town hall or the local fast food outlet?
Contestant: The local fast food outlet.

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Wright: What do you call a dead person who has been canonised?
Contestant: A bishop.

Notts And Crosses, BBC Radio Nottingham

Jeff Owen: Who invented the telescope and the thermometer?
Contestant (*long pause*): Er...
Jeff Owen: Think of Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen and you'll get it.
Contestant: Beelzebub?

BIRTSPEAK

"The challenge to the team is to find an audience-facing message that can really drive a shift in perception."

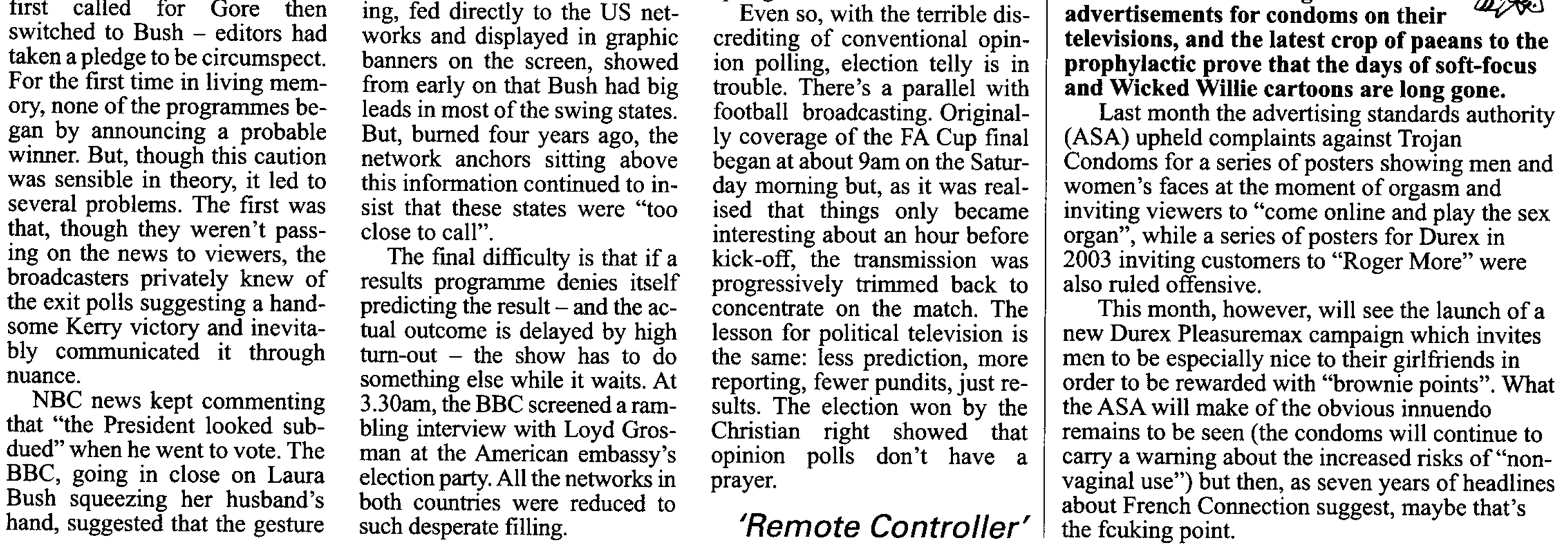
– **BBC publicity document**

AD NAUSEAM

IT IS 17 years since the government decided the British public could cope with the shock of seeing advertisements for condoms on their televisions, and the latest crop of paeans to the prophylactic prove that the days of soft-focus and Wicked Willie cartoons are long gone.

Last month the advertising standards authority (ASA) upheld complaints against Trojan Condoms for a series of posters showing men and women's faces at the moment of orgasm and inviting viewers to "come online and play the sex organ", while a series of posters for Durex in 2003 inviting customers to "Roger More" were also ruled offensive.

This month, however, will see the launch of a new Durex Pleasuremax campaign which invites men to be especially nice to their girlfriends in order to be rewarded with "brownie points". What the ASA will make of the obvious innuendo remains to be seen (the condoms will continue to carry a warning about the increased risks of "non-vaginal use") but then, as seven years of headlines about French Connection suggest, maybe that's the fcuking point.


THE PAUL O'GRADY SHOW
YES! THE CHAT SHOW THAT BREAKS NEW GROUND!
BY DOING THE PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE!
AND MAKING YOU WANT TO SWITCH OVER TO RICHARD & JUDY
Ken Pyne

MEDIA NEWS

THE BBC has at last admitted the obvious. Reporting from Baghdad has become so dangerous that, according to world news editor Jonathan Baker: "It's too risky to go out on the streets so we're limited to doing mostly two-ways" – usually from the (relative) safety of the BBC compound in a blocked off street surrounded by guards.

Pictures come from Arabic agency cameramen and analysis comes from London-based researchers standing by fax machines. So what's the point of correspondents being there at all?

Caroline Fawley is "having a rest" and has been replaced by two hacks, both of whom are dependent on the London newsroom, which is itself entirely dependent on the wire services like Associated Press, Reuters and the Press Association. All the in-country hacks can do is quote the wire copy and make a phone call or two to try to follow it up.

Keeping them on the ground of course costs a fortune. The journey from the airport to their bunker alone involves an armoured convoy of heavy private security vehicles costing at least £2,750 a trip, and a close protection team costs £6,000 each day.

Elsewhere, the BBC has two teams embedded with US and British units around Fallujah – embedded with all the other hacks from rival news agencies and dependent on the military for pictures and permission to go anywhere.

TESSA JOWELL's handling of the gambling bill isn't the only disaster facing the culture secretary. Her approach to broadcasting appears every bit as muddled.

First she has demanded that the BBC cut down on output "that does not fit with its central role of being a public service broadcaster", adding that some "new services" – presumably specialist digital ones – will be coming under "very close scrutiny".

Then she announced that the future "will see the growth of niche channels rather than the continued growth of mixed-genre channels".

This puts the BBC in some difficulty. It was encouraged by the government to lead the drive for a switch-over from analogue to digital, a move which is costing far more than predicted. But in the run-up to charter renewal, the BBC finds the same government critical of its digital strategy.

The Beeb can't just shut down the "new services" that aren't performing well (such as BBC Three) to spend more on public service broadcasting. So it will have to find the money from elsewhere. Rumours of job cuts across the corporation, possibly 20 percent of the workforce, are rife in White City.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Black is the new black." – Charlotte Abrahams, *Guardian*.

"Green is the new black." – *Entertainment Weekly*.

"Weeklies are the new black." – Sally O'Sullivan, *Observer*.

"Voting, or rather encouraging voting, is the new black." – Heather Bourbeau, *Financial Times*.

"Children's fantasy has become the new black." – *Empire* magazine.

"The new black is, well, no black at all." – Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian*.

"White is not the new black." – A. A. Gill, *Sunday Times*.

"The new black has to be black." – Sheena McDonald, *Sunday Express*.

"Black is frequently the new black. But this season, it isn't. It's purple." – Laura Craik, *Evening Standard*.

"Red is the new black." – *Sun*.

ITV was taking no chances after the Ufton Nervet rail crash claimed seven lives last weekend.

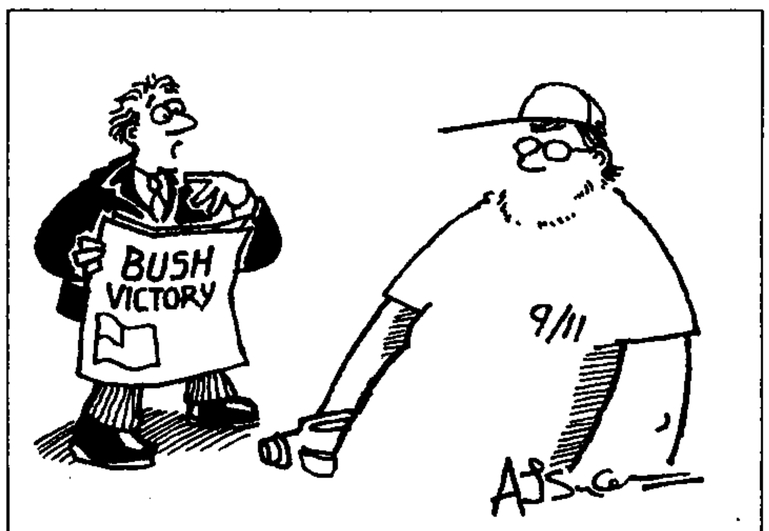
A scheduled showing of *The Railway Children* – with its controversial scenes of knicker-aided early warning systems – was dropped on Sunday afternoon, in favour of the safely pre-steam age *Robin Hood*.

Channel Five meanwhile made a hasty substitution in its Monday night documentary slot, with *Ultimate Combat Helicopters* flying in to replace the somewhat unfortunate *When Trains Crash*.

SKY NEWS's coverage of the third Bush v Kerry TV debate on 14 October was enlivened by an unusual solar event.

At 0730 UK time, Sky News ran an item about the debate, which ended with a reporter speaking to camera from outside the White House, commenting that not much had changed and it would still be a close run contest.

It must have been 0230 Washington time, but the reporter was speaking in broad daylight. So could the comments about the debate have been pre-recorded before the debate took place – or was there a particularly vivid solar flare that morning?



"Oh no... 4 Moore years!"

CHANNEL 4 is showing off its alternative credentials again by making the cornerstone of its Christmas schedule... Morecambe and Wise, in the shape of *The Unseen Eric Morcambe*, a documentary which promises home movie footage of the late comedian.

Another chance to, as the channel's press office puts it, "wallow in nostalgia" is *What Friends Did for Us*, a look back at the programme which ended all of six months ago (and has been repeated daily ever since). Since Channel 4 is flagging this up as one of its major Christmas highlights, it is presumably hoping that *Friends* fans do not notice it is actually the same cheap-and-cheerful clipfest that was supposed to go out back in May after the series' finale – but which had to be pulled from the schedules "because of unforeseen rights issues" with American producer, Warner Brothers.

GOING LIVE

"LIVE now to the White House here on Pennsylvania Avenue," said BBC News 24's Jon Sopel, reacting swiftly to reports that George Bush may have "gone to bed".

It was five o'clock in the morning US time and there was nothing to see: "We're not expecting to hear much from Bush until later in the day," Sopel reported.

When Bush eventually woke up to make a speech, Adam Brookes was on the spot for News 24. "Do we know what he is going to say?" asked Sopel.

"No we don't. We don't have any idea," replied Brookes helpfully.

THE *Times* pulled out one of their biggest guns to pay tribute to the late John Peel, with ex-teenage sensation Caitlin Moran declaring him a "pied piper for four generations" and "the fourth emergency service".

Keeping very quiet was the paper's radio critic, Chris Campling, who one week before the DJ's death had celebrated his absence from the airwaves on holiday: "Music lovers will doubtless be saying to themselves: 'I hope John Peel is away for a couple of weeks and some top-flight guest presenters will be filling in for him late-night on Radio 1'... If I were Peelie, I would be worried, frankly."

The paper's obituary was also rather coy about a magazine column Peel had written in the 1960s concerning schoolgirls, which it noted had "in later life caused him a mixture of amusement and embarrassment". Most of this embarrassment had in fact been caused by Julie Burchill, now a star columnist on the *Times*, who had for several years insisted on describing Peel as a "child abuser" whenever she mentioned him.

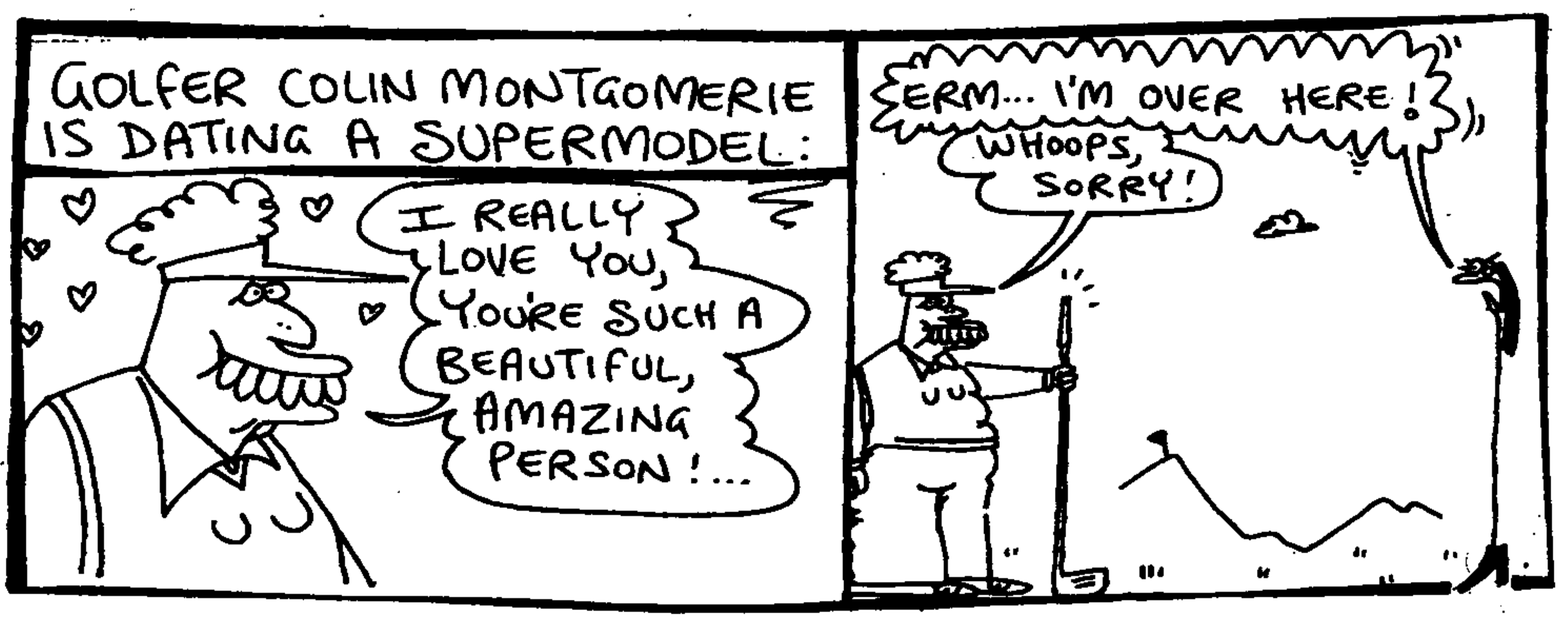
A GORMLESS stand-in presenter on ITV's *This Morning*, who was recently sacked from a newspaper for publishing faked photos, is forced to make a humiliating apology on air for warning viewers to expect an al-Qaeda terrorist attack in the next few days.

The story would seem to have all the ingredients for a sniping article in Marina Hyde's *Guardian* diary column, which never misses a chance to mock sofa-jockeys such as GMTV's Fiona Phillips for their lack of intellect. Yet there was no mention of this spectacularly dim cock-up.

Might this have anything to do with the fact that the bungling presenter was Piers "Morgan" Moron?

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


GOLFER COLIN MONTGOMERIE IS DATING A SUPERMODEL:
I REALLY LOVE YOU, YOU'RE SUCH A BEAUTIFUL, AMAZING PERSON!...
ERM... I'M OVER HERE!
WHOOPS, SORRY!

DOING THE ROUNDS

IT'S nearly 13 years since the *Eye* broke the Bristol heart scandal and suggested that all cardiac surgeons should publish their figures.

The Kennedy inquiry agreed, provided they were "robust, rigorous and risk adjusted" to ensure surgeons aren't penalised for taking on more difficult patients. And the government and Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons (SCTS) promised, in July 2001, that this information would be in the public domain for individual surgeons by April 2004. So where is it?

Health minister John "mini Milburn" Hutton was itching to get his hands on the statistics, doubtless so he could stick them in a league table and brand surgeons with another absurdly simplistic "new" Labour star rating. He blames the SCTS for not delivering; but as M.D. has repeatedly pointed out, doing audit properly is both expensive and unsexy. Trust managers divert even ring-fenced money elsewhere, with the result that Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, president-elect of the SCTS, had to type out the most recent 352 page mortality report single-handedly while on annual leave. "I have had no support of any kind from anyone apart from one small commercial company."

Cardiac surgeons have an unbelievably stressful job already. As one put it: "You've got to be operating at peak performance when you're inside someone's chest. If Michael Schumacher had to collect all the performance data for his Ferrari, analyse it and type it up single-handedly the night before a race, he'd be a shit driver."

Keogh has only raw data to go on – many of the NHS's 220 adult cardiac surgeons still don't have the facilities and expertise to adjust it for risk – but the good news is that none of them appears to be dangerously below average on his analysis. But until more accurate figures are collected, individuals will not be named.

The DoH has finally made this cardiac surgery data collection compulsory for trusts, but it needs to extend it to all specialties if its "choice agenda" is not going to be meaningless. To offer patients a choice of five different surgical teams by December 2005 without having any accurate comparative data on how to choose between them will result in chaos, or at least a pan-NHS game of "eeny meeny". Doctors too want this information. But the real test for MPs and the media is whether it can process the complexities of this information without resorting to bullying, star labelling and snap public judgement.

The omens are not good. The all-party parliamentary group on cancer recently concluded that GPs don't refer patients quickly enough and that we should go on "cancer education programmes". This was widely reported in the media as "GPs are crap at spotting cancer". When doctors miss the obvious (eg fail to refer a man who's peeing blood), it's indefensible; but cancer is often far harder to spot at an early stage in a six-minute consultation for an 80-year-old woman with diabetes, depression and irritable bowel who's feeling a bit off colour. On average, in only 0.0004 of our consultations do patients have cancer. A far more common scenario is for patients with suspected cancer to be referred to hospital to be seen within the two-week target, only to wait months for their investigations (colonoscopy, barium enema, etc) because the target was introduced without the extra resources to cope with the demand. Some die waiting, others live because they phone the hospital, make a fuss and insist they're seen earlier. In the NHS, it's survival of the loudest.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

EXCUSE ME, ATTENTION PLEASE, WE HAVE A PASSENGER UP FRONT WITH BREATHING DIFFICULTIES. IS THERE A DOCTOR ON BOARD?
OH COME ON, THERE MUST BE A DOCTOR ON THE FLIGHT
SORRY, HEALTH TRUST MANAGER
A&E ACCOUNT HANDLER
ERRR, NO. COST CONSULTANT FOR THE CITY HEALTH CENTRES
BEACON HOSPITAL ADMIN
MEDICAL TRUST CONTROLLER

SIGNAL FAILURES

Rail/Road safety

THE accident at a level crossing near Reading is a reminder of the folly of spending peanuts on road safety while pouring huge sums of money into making the rail system, already far safer than road, even safer.

Whatever the ultimate cause of Saturday's fatal crash, the problem of road vehicles interfering with railways is growing. Last year 18 people died in accidents at level crossings, twice as many as in 2000-01. Last year rail bridges were struck 2,013 times by road vehicles (up from 1,533 in 1999-2000), creating "potential for derailment", according to safety authorities. Most incidents where road vehicles affect railways go unremarked; but with so many happening, fatalities are inevitable.

After the horrific Selby crash in February 2001, caused by a car hurtling off a road and on to a main railway line, a token effort was made to identify sites where road vehicles could end up on the tracks. Improvements had been made at just 100 "high risk" sites by the start of this year.

Meanwhile the rail industry has spent nearly £600m on a device to reduce the risks from trains passing danger signals. That works out at more than £15m per fatality avoided, but it doesn't reduce the risk of trains hitting cars that have dodged crossing barriers or derailing on bridges dislocated by lorries.

The Reading accident prompted the usual calls for safety improvements at level crossings. The assumption is always that the rail industry will pay to upgrade crossings and maintain the complex kit. But why should rail passengers face yet more fares rises to pay for better crossings, when road-vehicle drivers are to blame for most level-crossing accidents? Higher fares would displace more people to the roads, where they would be in greater danger.

The obvious solution is for road taxes or duty to be raised to fund safety improvements, not just at level crossings but across the road network. That won't happen, of course, because "new" Labour and its pals in the road lobby are committed to keeping motoring costs static, or even reducing them, while train fares go on rising.

GOVERNMENTS normally shout loudly if they save taxpayers £250m a year without damaging services. So why did "new" Labour keep quiet in September when it saved that sum by agreeing to underwrite Network Rail's borrowing?

The first reason was chancellor Gordon Brown's determination to "Enron" the nation's accounts by omitting rail liabilities. "New" Labour has to pretend NR is a private company – a pretence even more untenable now that NR officially carries no financial risk.

The second reason was to maintain the private finance initiative (PFI) con. That month transport secretary Alistair Darling faced a renationalisation vote at the Labour party conference, and his sole justification of the privatised shambles was that it brought in £70m a week of private cash (Eye 1117). Most of that money is NR's borrowing – now guaranteed by the government and so no different from other public-sector borrowing. Claiming the £70m would vanish with renationalisation was deception on a grand scale.

Darling recently confirmed that South Eastern Trains is to be reprivatised in direct defiance of the renationalisation vote.

PS: The last Signal Failures accidentally omitted to explain that Leeds had cut the cost of its tram scheme by agreeing the public sector would bear some of the commercial risk. In other words, the private consortium running the trams cashes in if the going's good and the public sector stumps up if things go pear-shaped (as with Virgin Trains, etc.)

'Dr B. Ching'

Number crunching

49 ■ different train fares for travel between London and Manchester (Virgin Trains)

50 ■ months since train operators were due to simplify tickets

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

MOTLEY CREWE

THIS Sunday may see the last Remembrance Day service in Market Square, Crewe, where the town's war memorial has stood since it was erected by public subscription in 1924.

Labour-dominated Crewe and Nantwich borough council wants to spend £3m revamping the town centre and has decided that the memorial – a fine statue of Britannia with plaques on the base commemorating the town's war dead – doesn't fit in with the new look, despite a consultation with residents which came down overwhelmingly against moving it.

Planning consultants Gillespies have come up with a design for the square featuring a circle of ugly glass slabs (sorry, a "glass henge") and fountains that can be activated by text messages (*sic*). Gillespies consultant Jim Gibson says the idea is to give the square a "sexy, in-your-face" look, so obviously Britannia and her roll of the fallen have to go. She will be moved to Municipal "Square" – a scrap of grass in front of the council offices, currently a hangout for street drinkers, bounded on one side by a busy road and on the other by an underground car park.

Market Square itself, once lined with handsome Victorian and Edwardian buildings, has been comprehensively vandalised by generations of postwar planners, to the point that the war memorial is the only thing of merit left in it – but at least there it is at the centre of the town's life, where people see it every day. The next stage of the council's plan is the erection of a £100m shopping centre in the square by property company Modus as a shrine to what Mr Gibson calls "retail therapy". No room for something as un-modish as a war memorial.

BUNG HO

WHAT a diff'rence a donation makes, as Dinah Washington didn't quite sing.

Digger giant JCB has belatedly obtained planning permission for a house it built in breach of planning regulations five years ago near its headquarters in Rocester, Staffordshire.

Permission for the £500,000 barn conversion, intended as accommodation for JCB directors and senior managers, was originally granted in 1992. When work eventually started in 1999, East Staffordshire borough council discovered that it bore little resemblance to what permission had been granted for, most of the original fabric having been demolished and replaced by a new building.

This wasn't on because the barn was in a "special landscape area" with tight controls on what could be erected. JCB was warned seven times that it was in breach of planning permission. In 2002 the company was given six months to demolish the unauthorised building, a decision confirmed after a two-month public inquiry. Planning officers recommended refusal of further retrospective planning applications, but suddenly last month councillors granted permission.

Nothing had changed since the public inquiry... other than that control of East Staffs council had passed from Labour to the Tories. Oh – and last year JCB donated £280,663 to the Conservative party. So chummy are JCB and the Tories that when Michael Howard wants to go somewhere in a hurry he calls JCB chairman Sir Anthony Bamford, who kindly puts his helicopter at the Tory leader's disposal.

●Lambeth Lib Dem councillor Darren Sanders has given the game away in an email to his colleague Angie Meader. Sanders is discussing section 106 of the town and country planning act 1990, intended to allow planning applicants to compensate councils financially for services affected by proposed developments. Interpretation of this has proved a grey area over the years, so thanks to Cllr Sanders for calling a spade a spade: "It may also be prudent to look at any potential planning applications... and see if S106 (planning gain / bribes) is useful..." This exchange might well have remained private had not Cllr Meader proved to be, as well as cynical and venal, technically incompetent. Hitting the wrong key on her computer, she sent the whole exchange winging its way to an opposition Labour councillor, who gleefully decided to share it with the world.

OMAGH GOD

OMAGH district council in Northern Ireland (ODC) has scored another financial own goal – and, as in two previous scandals covered by the *Eye*, the council's former chief executive, John McKinney OBE, is embroiled in the action.

In the 1990s there were hopes that the new £3.5m Ulster History Park near Omagh would attract thousands of tourists as part of the much-vaunted "peace dividend" for the province. The "Real" IRA's bombing of Omagh in 1998, which killed 29 people, rather put a dampener on that. But the park struggled on until last winter, subsidised by some £500,000 a year from Omagh council.

In September ODC sold the site for just £700,000 to a consortium (of which McKinney is a member) which plans to turn it into a "care village" for the disabled.

Current chief executive Danny McSorley insists the process was open and above-board. Yet councillors were not given sight of the bids until the process was well advanced. Press and public were excluded from the meeting at which the bid was accepted and only found out about it because of a leak. Despite the sale, the council is still lumbered with a £1.5m mortgage on the site, which has prompted the local government auditor to investigate.

The current debacle comes after the Into the West scandal (*Eye* 1060), in which hundreds of thousands of pounds disappeared in unaccounted-for expenses run up by directors of a failed business start-up scheme. McKinney, who was at the time head of the EU special funds programme in Ireland and a director of ITW, denied any wrongdoing and no action was taken against him. McKinney's other triumph was when, under his watch as chief executive of ODC, the council loaned £142,000 to a community group for the purchase of sand for an equestrian centre and never got its money back (*Eye* 1064). Inspector Knacker is still looking into that one.

BIG BUCKS

MILTON KEYNES taxi driver Dennis Edwards (*Eyes passim*) has called for a public inquiry into official inaction over his allegations of corruption and links with organised crime within the taxi licensing department of Lib-Dem controlled MK council.

Last week Edwards notched up a small victory by persuading local Labour MP Brian White to write to David Blunkett alerting him to concerns about the pace of a police investigation. White tells the *Eye*, rather feebly: "I was asked to bring this to the attention of the home secretary, and that I have done. I have no idea if these allegations are true, but the matter needs to be resolved."

In June last year a judge threw out charges of harassment brought by MK council against Edwards, who had conducted a leaflet campaign alleging that council officers took backhanders to put extra work the way of Raffles Private Hire, a taxi firm controlled by Glasgow gangster Tam McGraw. After deputy district judge Geoffrey Wicks heard witnesses allege that bribery was routine in the MK taxi licensing department, he urged police to investigate Edwards's claims. Six months later, none of the key witnesses had been interviewed. Knacker now says a report has been handed to the crown prosecution service.

"Excuse me – could I have five minutes of your time?"

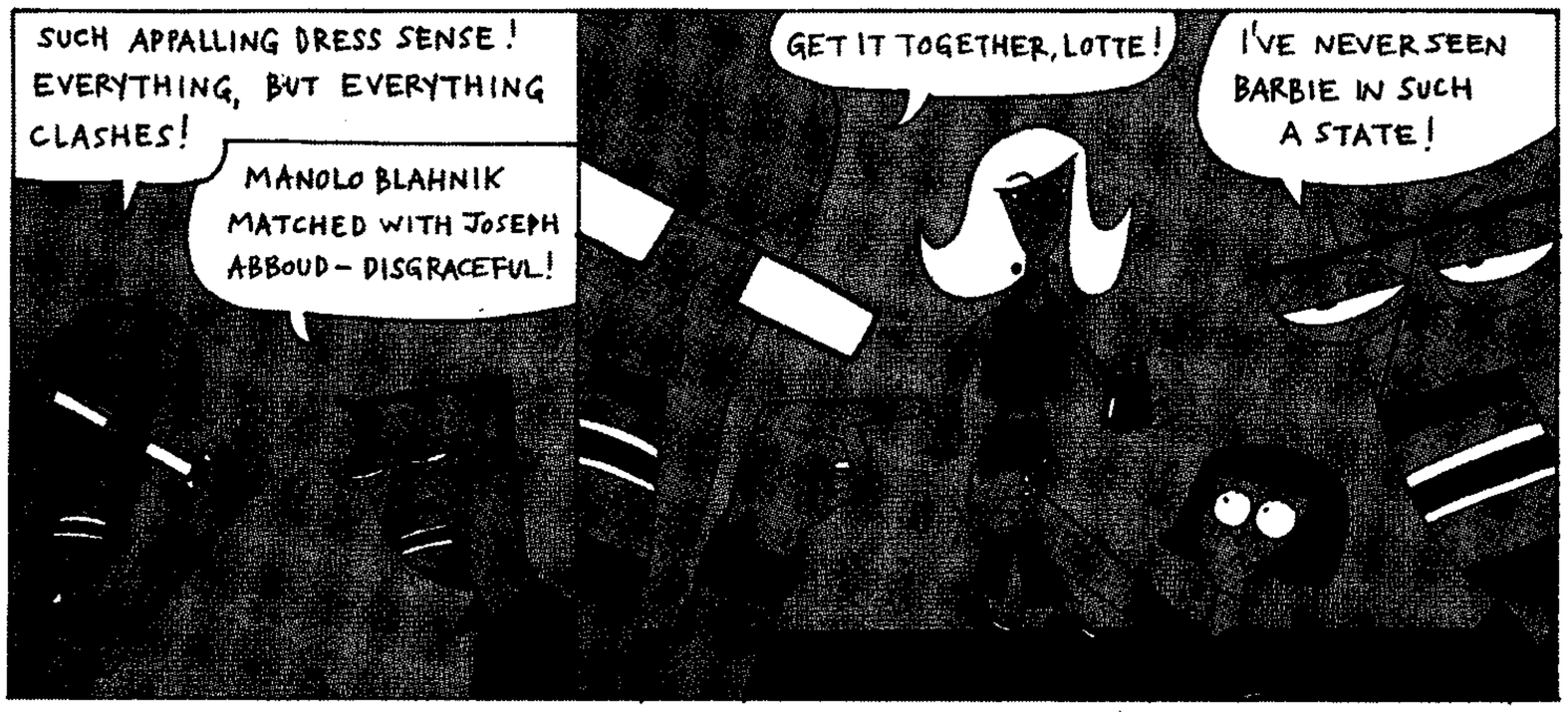
EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE latest tycoon to spend his way into "new" Labour's good books by founding a city academy is Rod Aldridge, executive chairman of the *Eye*'s favourite company, Capita.

Earlier this year Aldridge pledged £2m, to which the government will add another £18m, to found a "flagship" academy to replace the present Moorland High School in Darwen, Lancs, by 2007.

There is of course no suggestion of any connection between Aldridge's generous donation and the award last month of a £178m, five-year contract under which Crapita will run the national primary and key stage three "strategies" for schools. Crapita beat 40 other companies to the contract under what the department for education and skills called "fair, open and rigorous tendering arrangements". The runner-up was a not-for-profit company called the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT), which had had the contract, mainly concerned with training and developing teaching materials, since 1997. Three hundred staff from CfBT will now transfer to Capita.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


SUCH APPALLING DRESS SENSE! EVERYTHING, BUT EVERYTHING CLASHES!
MANOLO BLAHNIK MATCHED WITH JOSEPH ABBOUD – DISGRACEFUL!
GET IT TOGETHER, LOTTE!
I'VE NEVER SEEN BARBIE IN SUCH A STATE!

NOOKS and CORNERS

REST in peace Hafodunos Hall, the large Gothic Revival house near Llangernyw in Conwy, north Wales. Built in 1861-66 of red brick and stone, it was designed by the great Sir Gilbert Scott for Colonel Henry Robertson Sandbach and was one of the best examples of Scott's attempts to make Gothic modern and convenient.

The family sold the house in 1934; and in 1969 a subsequent owner tried to convert the property into an hotel together with a caravan park. Thereafter the story is depressingly familiar. Hafodunos was successively used as a college, an old-people's home and a hostel for the homeless while its condition deteriorated even though, by now, it was listed grade I.

In 1998 Conwy county borough council proposed to serve a repairs notice on the then owner, who promptly died. Things then got worse. After a proposal to convert the empty house into a "gay hotel" met with local opposition, it was then bought by Mr Duncan Evans – a "businessman" who was jailed in 2003 for his part in a massive VAT fraud. Hafodunos then passed to SFJ Ltd, a company based in Colwyn Bay, whose single shareholder, with a £1 share, is Mr Evans and whose transactions have been overseen by the official receiver. SFJ Ltd did not insure the building or keep it secure, so many of the grand chimneypieces were stolen while dry rot took hold.

Nevertheless the future remained bright. In 2001 Messrs SFJ Ltd proposed to convert Hafodunos Hall into a "four-star Welsh boutique hotel" and restore the house with the assistance of an enabling development of 90 Scandinavian timber holiday lodges in the grounds: "The vision is for the Hall to be restored to its 1864 grandeur to provide gracious hotel hospitality with fine Welsh catering..." [*sic*]. Although the Victorian Society was anxious that Conwy council should insist on a "section 106" agreement with the developer to ensure the restoration was carried out – "the last thing we would want to see is a large development erected in the grounds while the Hall itself is left to rot" – the proposal was not unreasonable.

Such intractable Gothic Revival piles can be made to work: Scott's similar Kelham Hall now serves as council offices for Newark-on-Trent and his Walton Hall in Warwickshire is a successful country house hotel.

Unfortunately Hafodunos is in north Wales, where there has been violent local opposition to building the holiday lodges. Last month the development plans were discussed at a public meeting at which strong objections were voiced. Shortly afterwards, during the night of 14 October, Hafodunos Hall went on fire (as they say in Glasgow). The interior was destroyed. "We are 90 percent sure that the fire was caused by vandals or squatters," remarked a spokesperson for the North Wales Fire Service. "There has been a history of petty vandalism at the property." Indeed, two local lads have since been arrested and they claim the fire was a "prank" which got out of hand.

John Rochelle, managing director of SFJ Ltd, is "totally devastated. The whole application hinges on the restoration of the hall and now it looks like the hall may be beyond economic repair."

Such a pity he had decided not to insure the grade I listed building his company owned because the risk of fire was too great. "I've repeatedly expressed my concern to the council about the possibility of fire," he insists. In fact an engineer, Brian Morton, has inspected the ruin for the Victorian Society and concluded that 90 percent of the structure is intact and need not be demolished. Is SFJ Ltd now going to proceed with restoration?

The sorry saga raises several questions. What is the point of listing a building if the concerned authorities are unable to prevent it being left empty, unprotected and rotting so that it becomes the perfect venue for boys on a night out with a can of petrol? And how many other historic buildings in Wales are in a similar condition and equally in danger?

Conwy's conservation officer estimates that 8 percent of the listed buildings in the county are "at risk". The Victorian Society is particularly concerned – rightly – that, just over the county boundary towards Rhyl, is Kinmel Park, a superb, listed Queen Anne house by W.E. Nesfield, which was restored after an earlier fire and now stands empty. Is anyone keeping an eye on that?

THE decay and destruction of listed buildings is not peculiar to Wales. The latest English Heritage Buildings at Risk register includes 14 listed structures in the London borough of Richmond on Thames alone.

One of these is the remarkable Normansfield Theatre, added to the enlightened and progressive Normansfield mental hospital at Hampton Wick, Teddington, in 1877-79. The hospital and grounds were sold by the NHS in 1999 to Laing Homes, who were granted planning permission by the council to build 198 new homes on condition that the (listed) Victorian hospital was converted into an hotel and the theatre was looked after. Guess what? The houses have been built but no work has been done to the hospital and the theatre is now "at risk".

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

It's a terrible idea, donating our work to the Tate–it demeans artist and gallery alike!
They didn't want his, then?
Obviously not...

I-SPY

Chomutov, Czech Republic

Submitted by Roy Laverick.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

EVERYBODY likes the Wexford Opera Festival: it's small, it's sociable, it's fun. And though it isn't quite the Irish Glyndebourne it would like to be, its regime of painfully obscure operas made bearable by an anaesthetising flow of Guinness and champagne wins it an international audience.

In a country where most of the music-making is, frankly, provincial, Wexford makes a big claim to be *international*. Alas, this doesn't win so many friends on its own doorstep; and the 2004 festival which has just finished has been marred by something close to civil war.

The problem dates back to 2001 when, as reported here, Wexford fell out with the Dublin-based RTE orchestra: effectively the national orchestra of Ireland and by tradition the band hired-in to play for all the Wexford operas. Wexford claimed the RTE was over-charging and engaged the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Belarus, who play for peanuts.

Since then Wexford has strengthened its ties with Eastern Europe, flying in whole choruses from towns with complicated names beyond the Tatras. And this year the orchestra was the Krakov Philharmonia: not one of the world's greatest ensembles, but certainly cheap.

Neither the RTE, the Musicians Union of Ireland, nor the Irish Arts Council have been happy about this; and last year the IAC officially censored Wexford for "failing to nurture Irish opera artists and practitioners", demanding in a sweetly Irish way that it "respond with vigour" to the complaint. What happened? The festival went on to programme a production of Mercadante's deeply obscure *La Vestale* with scarcely a son/daughter of Ireland to be seen or heard in it.

The unions are now out for blood. And as there are many Irish arts organisations who resent the €800,000 IAC grant given to Wexford this year (a disproportionate amount of the Irish arts pot), there's a lot of lobbying for Wexford to be penalised. They may, though, end up disappointed. The man who runs the Wexford Festival just happens by coincidence to be vice-chairman of the IAC. Now there's a funny thing.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

LUVVIES

"I waited in the wings like a Channel swimmer shivering on a beach with choppy water stretching as far as the horizon. However, somehow, some way, as actors always do, I reached the far shore."

MICHAEL BLAKEMORE
Arguments with England
(Blakemore's Autobiography)

Submitted by Christopher Gray, Oxford Times

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Letters

Peel appeal

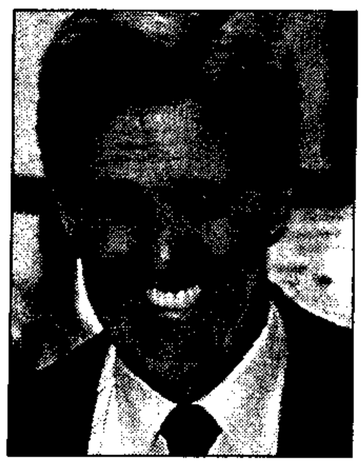
Sir,

Having always sneered at those sad souls who have cancelled their subscriptions at the slightest provocation, I now stand ready to do exactly the same if your next issue contains so much as a hint of an item along the following lines: "Exclusive to all newspapers: Man who played pop records dies."

Yours inconsolably,
KENNETH BISHTON,

Via email.

Lookalike



Munster

Kerry

Sir,

I don't know if anyone has pointed out the uncanny resemblance between cuddly, neo-Karloffian would-be ruler of the free world John Kerry and presidential candidate, the late Fred 'Herman Munster' Gwynne?

ALAN ROBINSON,

Via email.

Tuc-Up

Sir,

They say that a week is a long time in politics but now a month is more than enough before historical revisionism comes into play.

The TUC met in Brighton on the 6th to the 13th of September this year. Among the debates there was an important one on the subject of the future of Iraq. The motion in front of the Congress was unambiguous. It called for the speedy withdrawal of the coalition forces and the dismantling of their military bases, in favour of the Iraqi people being left to build their countries' infrastructure, public services and education systems with assistance from international agencies if required. Any reading of the debate, which is available on the TUC website, will find that the call was not for immediate withdrawal but for a timetable of steps to end the occupation. The call was not in isolation. Congress also pledged its support for the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions and urged both solidarity and practical support for the IFTU.

At the Labour Party conference, the debate, far from your assertion of being for or against speedy withdrawal, was around three resolutions. Composite 5, proposing the Government line, the simplistic composite 6, whose only demand was "an early date for withdrawal of British forces" and an NEC statement.

This commits the government to the terms of UN resolution no. 1546, forcing them to abide by UN resolutions and international law and committing them to a timetable, possibly the most effective way of achieving a policy of withdrawal.

JANE CAROLAN,

Unison NEC.

Catholic tastes

Sir,

I am a Catholic, but did not think the Alternative History cartoon (issue 1117) anti-Christian. My understanding was that the depressed-looking figures surrounding the cross bearing the crucified Christ were being comforted by a politician (he should have displayed more teeth), urging them to "put this behind us and move on". Rather like our dear leader who is quite tired of the dead and mutilated of the Iraq adventure, n'est-ce pas?

I now draw a line and move on.

Yours faithfully,
NORAH TOOMEY,

East Harling.

Lovely Lynda

Sir,

I am sorry that I wasn't on that list of possible successors to Lynda Lee-Potter.

You obviously have no idea how to really irritate Paul Dacre, beast of this Parish.

I didn't know Lynda well, except to say "Hello" in corridors, so I was rather stunned to hear that Lynda had phoned the paper wanting to know why they had fired me and whether I was doing OK. Apparently she was very concerned. That was a few days before she died, from her deathbed in fact.

She may have been scratchy sometimes in her column but she was also astonishingly generous.

JANE KELLY,

Via email.

Toxic shock

Sir,

Koen de Smet is wrong to suggest the Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons is "oddball" for advocating use of DDT under certain conditions. Contrary to what de Smet implies, DDT is not toxic to humans. It is very toxic to invertebrates and, sadly, severely damaging to birds and other species since it does not (as pointed out) easily biodegrade. Its relative harmlessness to humans is exactly what led to its widespread use and misuse, and is what is leading calls for its reintroduction in malarial countries.

One fifth of children in Africa die from malaria – an astounding figure. If used entirely indoors (as it is in fact currently used in some tropical countries) it can help to reduce this enormous death toll. If Europe or US had the malarial carnage of tropical countries, DDT would be hauled back sharpish.

The (not intractable) problem arises in ensuring that during manufacture, distribution, use and disposal, none of it enters the environment. Under extremely strict controls, even the drug Thalidomide has been reintroduced due to its benefits for leprosy, despite its great teratogenic dangers. It is all too easy to attempt to "rubbish" an opponent based on a trivial understanding of the issues.

Yours faithfully,
KEN TOUGH,

Pretoria, South Africa.

Scenes You Seldom See

"Everything is overpriced round here. Honestly, I'd look somewhere else"

No Mersey

Sir,

In the Liverpool feature (Eye 1118) you quote Michael Henderson, Times, November 1998: "... wearing its decline as a badge of honour".

In fact, that "badge" went nationwide over 30 years before that. Tarbuck at the Palladium:

"How many work at Liverpool Docks?"

"About half of them."

Thus, it was also implied that "idleness" and "fiddling" were also OK – especially large scale – which may presumably and allegedly have led eventually to the Hattonistas?

Yours faithfully,
C.M. LAYTON,

London N9.

Soames watch

Sir,

An article in your publication regarding Nicholas Soames has been brought to our attention.

In this article, entitled "Weightwatch", you purport to represent that Mr Soames has some form of conflict between views he has expressed regarding housing development and his chairmanship of the Framlington Second Dual Trust plc.

Firstly, may we point out that investment decisions for this company rest with the investment manager, not the chairman of the board.

Secondly, the company does not have a shareholding in Berkeley as specified in your article.

Thirdly, the actual holdings in Crest and Persimmon represent 0.03 percent and 0.15 percent of those companies respectively. Indeed, these holdings represent just 1.16 percent and 0.86 percent of the assets of the trust and therefore could not in any way be accurately described as "significant".

We trust that this information will ensure that you refrain from making erroneous statements of this nature in the future regarding either Mr Soames or the Framlington Second Dual Trust plc.

Yours faithfully,
ILLEGIBLE,

Secretary, Framlington Investment Management Limited.

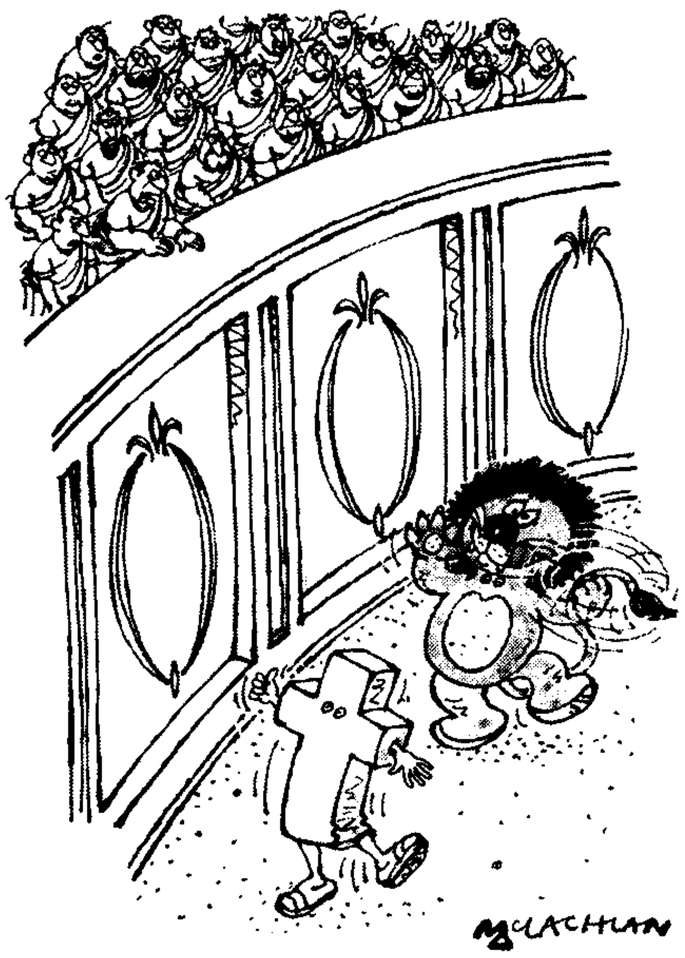
Nepalling error

Sir,

I don't suppose I will be the only reader to point out that King Gyanendra of Nepal is the uncle of the Crown Prince who single-handedly wiped out most of the country's royal family, not his brother as incorrectly stated in Eye 1118.

Yours faithfully,
ROD PARKES,

Hong Kong.



"I'm not sure having team mascots adds anything to the Games"

Pensioned off?

Sir,

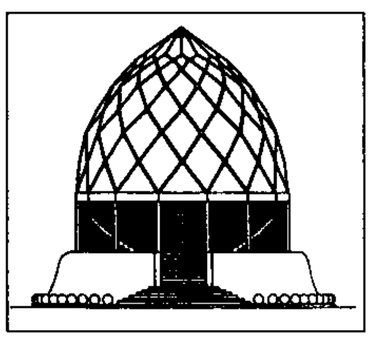
Re: your Number Crunching feature (p7, 1118). The number of jobs that the Dept. of Work and Pensions propose to cut is 30,000 and not the 3,000 mentioned in the box. This is part of a Civil Service-wide cull of 104,000 jobs announced by Gordon Brown in his Budget speech.

I have no dispute, however, with the amount which is wasted on consultants, who are brought in merely to reinforce management prejudices.

With this small caveat, keep up the good work.

WILLIE ROSS,

Via email.



In a pickle

Sir,

Re your cartoon on page 12 of issue 1118. Lord Foster possibly got the idea for the Gherkin in the bath but more likely from Bruno Taut's glass pavilion in the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition.

Nothing wrong with that, of course – the history of art and architecture is the history of cribbing.

Yours faithfully,

JIM CRIBBENS,

London W11.

Life solutions

Sir,

I completely agree with your correspondent about the overuse of the word "solutions". One I saw on a lorry recently proudly proclaimed it to be "delivering logistics solutions". In other words – it's a lorry.

Kind regards,

VINCENT SWEENEY,

Via email.

Sir,

For some months now, Tesco has catered for its problem eaters by directing them to aisles containing "Chinese Meal Solutions", "Indian Meal Solutions", "Italian Meal Solutions"...

MARIAN SMALES,

York.

Kilroy was here?

Sir,

Just thought you might like to know that the clip of Robert Kilroy-Silk and the shop window that's mentioned in the latest issue is actually from the Chris Morris TV series "Jam" and featured in the first episode, broadcast at least four years ago, and is available on DVD as well. All they seem to have done is changed the soundtrack.

Cheers,

TIMON MAHONY,

London W1.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"You have to score goals these days to win international matches."

JIMMY ARMFIELD, Radio 5 Live
(Michael Watson)

"He favours his lefthand foot..."

CHRIS WADDLE, Radio 5 Live
(Ian Langmead)

"The trouble with so many of them [budget airlines] is that they land 50 miles from the nearest airport."

MICKEY CLARK, Radio 5 Live
(Peter Quinn)

"Later in the programme we will be talking about the Lambeth report on homosexuality. The Archbishop of Canterbury has had it on his desk for the last few weeks."

Radio Oxford
(John Mole)

"Coulthard and Villeneuve are battling it out for last place."

MARTIN BRUNDLE, ITV
(Jonathan Cocking)

"I guess you must be The Nerdy Kid"

Mandy's mandate

Sir,

I read the letter from the po-faced killjoy in Stirling complaining with regards to your joke about Mandelson's street address in Brussels. Mandelson commands zero respect as he has often sought to conceal his sexuality instead of speaking up for this minority group of which he is a part.

Witness the recent furore over the homophobic comments of Rocco Buttiglione: Mandy completely failed in his duty to speak up on the matter, instead supporting the doomed-to-fail commissioner. Alas, though, Mandy's purchase of the £500,000 mansion in this street has now fallen through, but I live in hope of there being other amusing street names in Brussels!

Yours faithfully,

SCOTT ALLISON,

Glasgow.

PS: There's a picture in your archives, it always reminds me why I am "glad to be gay" – perhaps you could reprint it again for the benefit of other readers? (Clue: ageing Scottish lothario attached to Asian babe.) If not, there's always the very fetching sight of Mandy in three-quarter-length trouser-shorts on the day he was put up for the EU job – a sight to make your eyes sore if ever there was. [No. Ed]

In the beginning...

Sir,

Although such a thing is expected in book critics, your reviewer's smug, ivory-towered bashing of The Ancestor's Tale still came as an unpleasant shock. "No one's all that bothered. They're all indoors watching telly." Not only is this insulting to his implied reader, but it's also utterly naïve and untrue. If people were not bothered, we wouldn't have the farcical take-over by Creationism that's happening in American schools. As long as this stone-age mentality continues to prevail, Dawkins is entitled to rant on about cavemen as much as he damn well pleases.

Also, I honestly can't figure out if "reductio ad invisibilium" is a poor attempt at humour or a poor attempt at critical thinking. If it's the former, then I'm taking it to be a theist's ignorant swipe at Naturalism, in which case I ask him to provide a more valid alternative, seeing as he obviously knows so much better than the rest of us. (And no – Plantinga does not count as a valid alternative.)

If the latter, then surely this "Latin" phrase belongs in Pseuds' Corner, seeing as it is neither Latin nor a recognised logical fallacy.

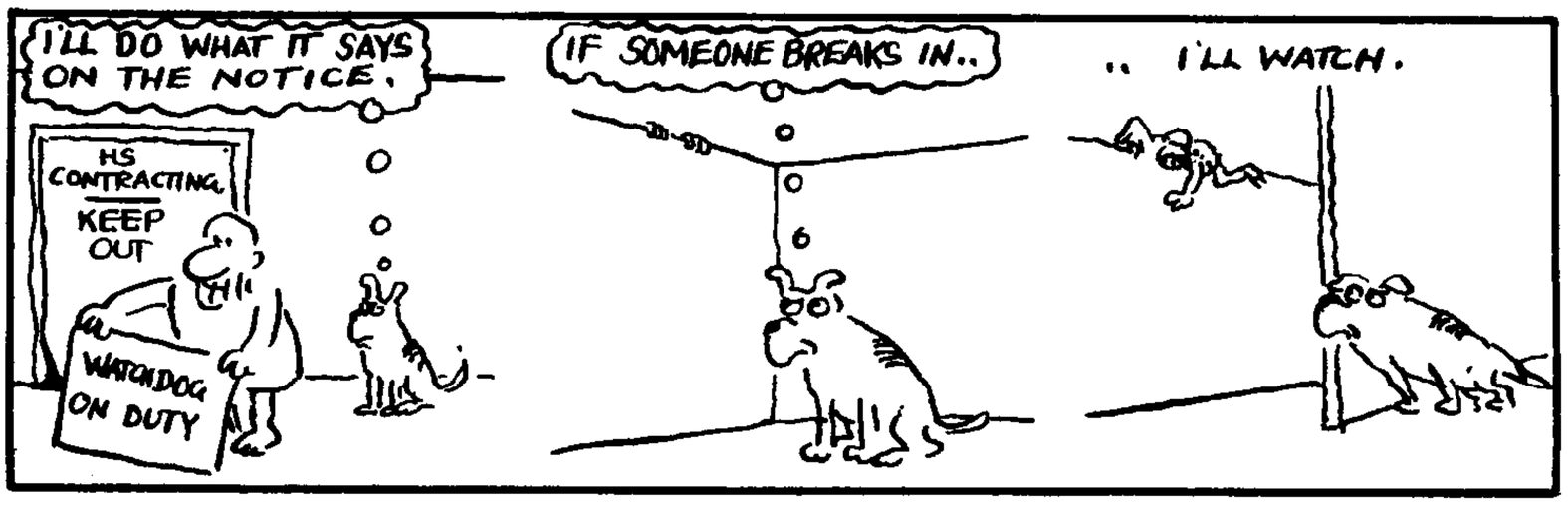
Yours faithfully,

LUKE SANDERS,

Via email.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Tehran**

from Our Own Correspondent

A FEW years ago the momentum of our reform movement, led by President Mohammed Khatami, appeared unstoppable.

Reformists were consolidating control of Iran's parliament and presidency, and resisting the heavy-handed rearguard actions of the conservatives. Reformist newspapers were springing up by the dozen; and on the streets of fashionable, middle-class north Tehran, young women were getting away with increasingly provocative challenges to the strict dress rules of the Islamic republic: more hair and makeup, less veil.

Then came President Bush's axis-of-evil speech and a stream of neo-con threats from Washington and Tel Aviv. According to the neo-cons, regime change in terrorist-sponsoring, Israel-hating, nuclear weapons-developing Tehran would be the inevitable consequence of the US triumph in Iraq. Predictably, the unravelling of the US strategy in Iraq has led to the unravelling of its strategy on Iran.

On the face of it US and Israeli claims that Iran's nuclear programme is not entirely peaceful (as we insist) are more plausible than the now discredited claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. But the evidence has yet to be produced and the flagrant misuse of the intelligence on Iraq's WMD will not help the Americans convince many in the world (apart from Tony) there is a sound case against Tehran.

Iran has long had good strategic reason to develop WMD. Israel, Pakistan, India and Russia all have them aplenty, and Iraq actually used chemical weapons against us in the 1980s (with a nudge and a wink from the west). The US invasion of Iraq and Washington's increasingly belligerent posture towards the Islamic republic have now given the mullahs further incentives to develop nuclear weapons capability and fast.

On the domestic political front, just as hardliners in Washington have been using war and threats of war in the Middle East to win another four years in power, our hardliners are using US threats as an excuse to bolster their own hitherto dwindling political fortunes. In Iran's parliamentary elections this year, the conservatives – who still control the judiciary and the unelected but powerful "Expediency and Guardian Councils" – managed to block the candidature of scores of reformers. The result? A boycott by the reformists' supporters and a new parliament stuffed with conservatives. Reformist newspapers are indulging in ever stricter self-censorship to avoid being closed (and are shut down anyway). Over the summer scores of young women were reportedly detained and beaten for non-adherence to Islamic dress code.

One thing hasn't changed, though: the fearless contempt for the regime among ordinary folk. This month the head of the Expediency Council, former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (also known as the "Pistachio King" for his alleged business acumen), took the unusual step of denying rumours that he has used his political power to amass a fortune.

However, those among us who 18 months ago looked forward to the Americans marching from Baghdad to Tehran have changed their tune: it appears they prefer stability and relative prosperity under the mullahs to violent mayhem unleashed by a US invasion.

The irony is that for much of the 90s we were moving towards a more democratic style of government that could have provided a model for the kind of transformation Bush and Blair say they want to see in the Middle East. Iranians have had 25 years under Islamist rule. As a result, unlike the Arabs, they want less of it, not more. For now it seems the latest US adventure risks achieving in Iran exactly the opposite of what it was hoped it would achieve: a greater risk of nuclear proliferation and less democracy.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"It is most unfortunate that the harassment of supermarket workers is quite common in the Czech Republic," Trade Union leader Alexandr Leiner told delegates in Prague, "especially with regard to toilet breaks. But even we found it hard to believe one of our safety inspectors, when he told us about a scheme that a German-owned retail chain was proposing to introduce. So we checked out the story, and found that the employers really were planning to make female cashiers wear luminous red headbands when they were having their period. And that under the scheme, unscheduled bathroom visits would only be allowed if the women wore the ribbons to announce to the world that they were menstruating."

Leiner, who is chairman of the Czech Confederation of Trade Unions of Employees in Trade, declined to name the supermarket chain, but added, "We protested to the company about the idea of menstruation headbands for cashiers, and eventually talked them out of it. But our members frequently tell us that they're prevented from taking toilet breaks when they need to. Things are even worse in Poland though. Over there, I've heard that some retail managers have ordered all their cashiers, male and female, to wear disposable nappies during work, so they won't need to take toilet breaks at all." *(Mlada fronta Dnes, 30/7/04. Spotter: Julian Shea)*

–o–

"*Even though there was a headless corpse in the truck, we don't suspect foul play," Cpl. Dana Pierce of the Cobb County Police told reporters in Atlanta, Georgia. "We found the missing head by the roadside about twelve miles from where the vehicle was parked, and don't think any murderous intent was involved. Just a great amount of stupidity. And an even greater amount of alcohol."*

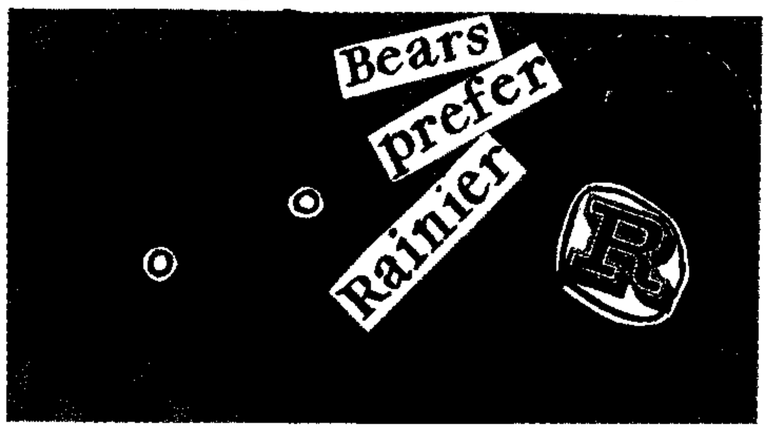
Cpl. Pierce then described what had apparently happened during the previous night. "John Kemper Hutcherson and Daniel Brohm had been drinking heavily all evening in a bar, and left when Brohm said he felt sick. Hutcherson began driving them both home, with Brohm hanging his head out of the passenger seat window. About a mile from the bar, the truck swerved off the road and passed close to a telephone pole. The pole's support wire seems to have decapitated Brohm as they drove past, because we found his head close by, and there were traces of blood on the wire.

"Hutcherson was so drunk that he carried on driving home without noticing anything. It's hard to imagine that anyone could drive twelve miles without realising that the passenger sitting next to them had lost his head, but that's apparently what happened. When he reached his driveway, he just crawled inside his house and fell asleep in his bloody clothes. A neighbour called us out this morning, after seeing the headless body sitting up in the passenger seat of the truck, and we found Hutcherson in his bed, covered in blood, and still visibly inebriated. He had no idea of what had happened, and seemed genuinely remorseful when we told him. He's now in Cobb County jail, where we've charged him with first-degree vehicular homicide, failing to maintain lanes, and jumping lights." (The Item [South Carolina], 31/8/04. Spotter: Stafford)

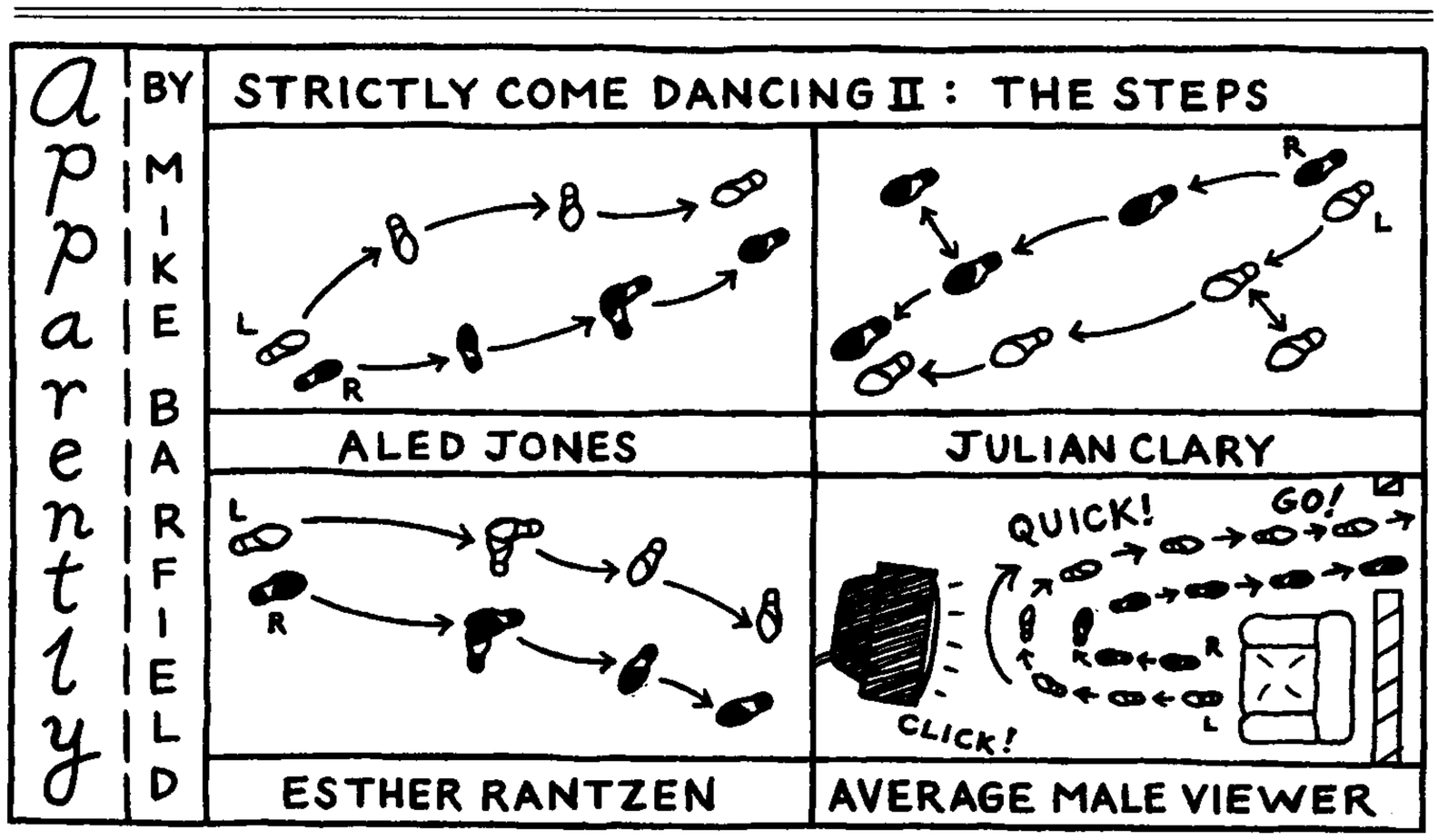
–o–

"We noticed a huge black bear sleeping on the lawn, and wondered what was going on," campsite worker Lisa Broxson told reporters at the Baker Lake Resort near Seattle. "But when we got closer we could see what had happened. He was surrounded by dozens of empty beer cans, which he'd stolen from the campers' cool boxes and had managed to open with his claws and teeth. And now he was sleeping off the effects in the sun."

Wildlife ranger Sgt Bill Heinck took up the story. "The bear had drunk about thirty-six cans of beer, and he was clearly a beer sophisticate. At first, he'd tried a can of mass-market Busch beer. But he obviously didn't like it, because he ignored the other cans, and switched to Rainier beer, which is a local ale and much superior. When he woke up, he



stumbled off unsteadily into the woods, but he returned the next day, looking for more drink. A hard-drinking bear hanging around the campsite could be dangerous, so we set a trap for him, with doughnuts, honey, and enough Rainier beer for him to anaesthetise himself again. Sure enough, we found him drunk and asleep a few hours later, and he's now been sent for relocation, far away from human habitation. And from beer." *(Yakima Herald-Republic, 19/8/04. Spotter: Ben Bardsley)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Glory, Glory Hallelujah!!!

That has to be the message this week, as we all rejoice in the good news from our brethren in America!

Our good friend, the Rev. Dubya, has been re-anointed to serve as Supreme Pastor of all the Morons in the United States of America!

Good news indeed for all of us here in St Albion's, who have derived such inspiration from this great spiritual leader of our time!

And how privileged we are that, amid all the excitement and 'hullabaloo' surrounding his historic re-appointment, the Rev. Dubya has agreed to contribute a personal message to all his friends in St Albion's.

From The Office Of The Chief Moron, The White House of the Lord, Washington J.C.

Dear Morons,

Praise the Lord for giving us this great victory over the forces of darkness and evilitude!

Hallelujah! His hand is mighty in lifting up his servant (that's me, folks!) and casting down the hosts of Midian (that's Kerry, guys!) with all the fornicators, sodomites, flip-flop girly men and atheistical abortion-lovers!

And now, having given us this great deliverance, the Lord is sending us forward in our crusade against the Evil One!

And, lo, the trumpet shall sound, and the city of Fallujah shall be laid waste, as was the city of Jericho in bygone Israel-land!

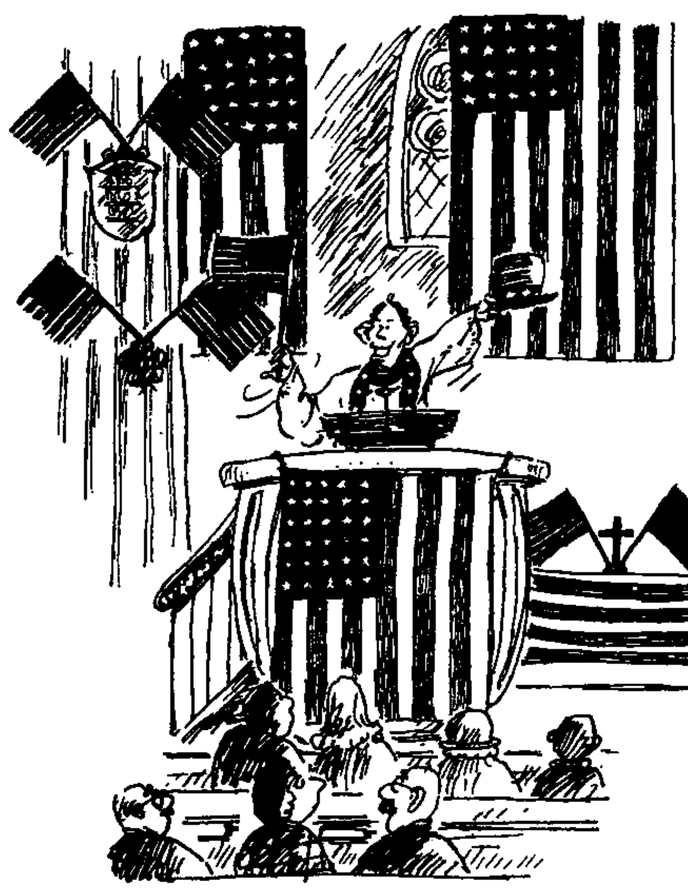
Doesn't that lift your hearts, brothers and sisters? And where next will the sword of righteousness fall in our mission to bring peace and harmony to all the peoples of the earth?

Tremble, o ye coyotes, at the mighty name of Dubya!

For, in the words of Brother Schwarzenegger of the Grand Order of the Terminators, yea I am back!

Sister Condy and Brother Rumsfeld join me in thanking you all for your support and your prayers, which the Lord in his wisdom has heartened unto, even 50-million-fold!

Way to go! Bring it on! Hallelujah!
Yours with the Moron Majority,
Rev. Dubya



The vicar shows his solidarity! By local artist Mr de la Nougerede

Help spread the Good News by posting this letter in your window or passing it on to a fellow Moron.

Printed and published by The Friends Of The Tabernacle, C/o the Hallelujahburton Group

Parish Postings

👍 ***CONGRATULATIONS*** to Mrs Jay on her new appointment to our Committee For Standards in Parish Life. No one could be better qualified to root out sleaze and nepotism than Mrs Jay, whose father the Rev. Callaghan was, of course, one of our most-respected incumbents, who older parishioners will remember appointed her husband as head of our mission in America. She is also, of course, a very old friend of our present vicar, and helped set up a charity to help him when he was a young curate, the Help The Blind Trust. She was also for a while Matron-in-Charge of the St Albion's Sunset Home for Retired Gentlefolk, where she did sterling work getting rid of a lot of the inmates, and releasing them back into the community. So, best of luck to Margaret, as she roots out all that shady business that we all so disapprove of.

PARISH TALKING POINT

There have been suggestions that we should discontinue referring to ourselves as St Albion when so many people in our multi-cultural parish are offended by the use of the word "saint". What do you think? And if you agree, what name would you like? How about: Mullah Albion? Rabbi Albion? Maharishi Yogi Albion or even L. Ron Albion?

Do drop us a line or better still log on to our website and join in the great debate! www.saint-gone/albions.co.uk

Women's Groups

We are very fortunate to be able to welcome the vicar's wife, Mrs Cherie Booth, next month when she will give a talk on "How to Give Talks in America". Mrs Booth will be explaining how to supplement the family income by trading on your husband's name and she will tell us amusing anecdotes about eating breakfast in the vicarage. Anyone lucky to get a ticket for this – they are going for only £300 each – will learn what the vicar thinks about *Golden Grahams* and why he prefers *Honey Nut Loops*!

WARNING: Mrs Booth has asked us to make clear that anyone who alleges that on her recent lecture tour of the USA she was in any way critical of or disrespectful to her husband's friend the Rev. Dubya, Pastor-in-Chief of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons, will be liable to receive a writ and a claim for damages for the infringement of her human rights. This, she points out, could result in an award of not less than £1 million and/or a sentence of life imprisonment commuted to death.

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN: GAMBLING

by The Vicar

In last week's newsletter some readers may have been surprised by the headline given to my article, "God's Gift Of Gambling", in which I appeared to argue that to have slot machines in the south transept and a roulette wheel in the crypt would enrich the spiritual life of the parish.

This was due to an unfortunate typographical error by Mrs Jowell, when she was composing my article, which somehow caused the word 'not' to be omitted from a number of key sentences.

For example, when I apparently wrote "every right-thinking person must be in favour of a massive extension of gambling", I, of course, meant "not in favour".

And when I appeared to say "anyone who opposes my proposals is a snob", I, of course, meant "is not a snob".

I'll put my hand up to this one and say, hey, Mrs Jowell was wrong! And I have asked Mr Birt, our systems expert, to take a look at the vicarage computer and see if he can find a way of ensuring that this sort of silly mistake will never happen again. Thanks, John! T.B.

HOON WILL BE OVER BY CHRISTMAS

Government New Pledge

by Our Defence Staff **Phil Coffins**

THE PRIME Minister has promised that, come what may, the Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, will be withdrawn by Christmas.

"Hoon has been in the front line over Iraq, taking flak from all sides," said the Prime Minister.

Black Death

"The least we can do is bring him home for Christmas to spend time with his family."

However, angry relatives of Mr Hoon said, "He should never have been there in the first place. He is totally ill-equipped for this type of action."

Fall-ujah guy

They continued, "Anyway, we do not believe this assurance from the Prime Minister. He has promised before to relieve him of his duties, but Geoff is still there on the front line being sniped at".

BACKWARDS VOTERS WERE THE KEY TO ELECTION RESULT

by Our Political Staff **Eve Angelical** and **Elvis Presbyterian**

THE humiliating defeat in the recent election has been put down to "the primitive beliefs" of people living in the North East of England, according to the Government.

Said an angry John Prescott, clearly smarting from his defeat, "These people are still living in the Middle Ages. They refuse to believe in devolution even when everyone else in the world accepts it. They are simple, uneducated and wrong. In the modern world, the devolution theory, as propounded by great minds such as myself and Tony Blair, has been proved to be the only explanation for human progress."

Boris's Shameful Secret

by Our Political Staff
Simon Hefferlump

BORIS JOHNSON was fighting for his political life last night after claims that he had been having an intimate relationship with a once-glamorous magazine.

The 42-year-old Tory MP and Shadow Minister for the Arts has been spotted making furtive visits to the Doughty Street home of the magazine.

Why Oh Wyatt?

Said one neighbour, "We often see him arriving here on his bicycle. He rushes in and then comes out again shortly afterwards looking tired and emotional."

She continued, "He's clearly up to something. I think he's editing a magazine."

Heavy Petsy

But Johnson flatly denied the allegations. "I do not edit the Spectator," he said. "I am familiar with it, but to suggest anything further is utter nonsense. This is an inverted pyramid of piffle. It's the sort of thing that I would normally pubish er... cripes" *(cont. p. 94)*

Do You Think Boris Is Having An Affair?

☐ YES or ☐ YES

● Vote now to determine the future of the next leader of the Conservative Party.

Exclusive to all newspapers

Paula Radcliffe

An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression that we considered Ms Paula Radcliffe's career to be over and that furthermore her Olympic performances had in some way let the nation down. Headlines such as "Pathetic Paula Turns On The Tears", "Why Don't You Try The Disabled Marathon, You Hopeless Crybaby?" and "Drop Dead, You Loser!" may have led readers to infer that we considered Ms Radcliffe as a less than competent competitor in the field of long-distance running.

Following her victory in the New York Marathon, we now realise that Ms Radcliffe is an outstanding athlete who proudly represents her country at the highest level and should be given suitable recognition of her services to the nation in the form of a Damehood (see piece "Arise Dame Paula, Britain's Golden Girl and Marathon Marvel").

We would like to apologise unreservedly to our readers for any misunderstanding following earlier reports.

© All newspapers

The Home Secretary Mr David Blunkett attempts to explain the political thinking behind the move to conduct a Referendum on the desirability of a devolved Regional Assembly for the North East of England

POETRY CORNER

In memoriam Fred Dibnah, Steeplejack and TV personality.

So. Farewell
Then Fred
Dibnah.

Famous steeplejack
From Bolton.

You climbed to
Amazing heights.

Now you are
Going up
Even higher.

E.J. Thribbnah (17½)

Also. Farewell
Then Howard
Keel.

Star of Hollywood
Musicals such as
Seven Brides for
Seven Brothers.

Not to be
Confused with
The Magnificent Seven
With its memorable
Theme tune.

All together
Now –

Dum Di-da-da-dum
Dum Di-da-da-dum
Da-da
Di-da-DA-da...

Also. Farewell
Then
Yasser Arafat.
Possibly.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

RAILCRASH

'ABOLISH THESE DEATH TRAPS'

Demands Union Boss

by Our Speculation Staff
Phil Pages

IN THE light of the disastrous train crash, Rail Union boss Bob Scarecrow called for the withdrawal of all trains in order to ensure 100% safety on Britain's rails.

"These trains are very heavy and travel at over 100mph. We have warned the Government again and again that they are accidents waiting to happen, but *(cont. p. 94)*

THE WEDDING BELL TOLLS

A new story by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of 'La Dame Aux Camillas', 'Heir of Sorrows' and 'Never Too Old'

THE STORY SO FAR: Charles and Camilla have been invited to the society wedding of the year, between Lady Tamara Boomdeay, daughter of the Duke of Westland, and Charles's godson, Tarquin van Driver, son of the 14th Earl of Transit and Lady Fiesta Vauxhall.

Now read on...

"HOW do I look, Charles?" Camilla pirouetted in front of the full-length mirror to show off the exquisite powder-blue picture hat from top designer Stella Artois.

Charles was sitting on the edge of the four-poster bed, clutching the morning's post.

"It's very, thingie, you know, er, yeah," he murmured.

"And that's just the hat, darling," she enthused.

"This afternoon I've got a fitting at Rageehomar's. They're making me the most fabulous, full-length outfit out of organic silk."

"Oh, tremendous," he murmured, as he gazed out at the Islamic fountain in the shape of a minaret, standing at the end of his new Vista of Spiritual Contemplation.

"And by the way, Chazza, I do hope you don't mind, I've charged the whole thing to the Highgrove farm account. I think ten grand should cover it."

Charles paled visibly. "Oh, that sounds rather a lot. I suppose that'll be alright."

"No, it will be marvellous, Charles," she breezed on. "The first time we' ve been at a really big event as a couple, sitting next to your parents. I chose the powder-blue

because your mother always wears blue, and we don't want to clash."

As she spoke, Camilla was opening a brand new shoe box, embossed with the name of *Letts and Heffer, Shoemakers to the Upper Classes since 1831*, and held up a pair of exquisite blue court shoes.

"You see, they match my hat and they'll go so well with whatever your mother's wearing, as we sit there next to each other in the front row."

"Ahem," Charles coughed nervously, as he avoided Camilla's eye and continued to fix his gaze on the gnarled figure of old Rothermere, the under-gardener, as he raked up another pile of organic leaves to be turned into Duchy Original Oak-Flavoured Yoghurt.

"Er, yes, Camilla old thing. I'm, er, glad you've brought that up. You see, the plan seems to be not quite what we thought."

As he spoke he was fingering a large ivory, gold-embossed invitation card.

"You see, the front pew is rather narrow. And once you've got mater and pater and me in it, and of course all the immediate family, well, there's only room for about 20 of us..."

"So, what are you trying to say, Charles?" she interrupted. "You mean, I won't be sitting next to you? I suppose I'm being stuck at the back with hoi polloi, am I?"

"Oh, no," Charles protested, as his face flushed, matching the scarlet of the Virginia Bottomley creeper that wound its way along the façade of the East Wing.

"Not quite at the back. Row 93 is quite near the front actually. And I can lend you my binoculars."

The Royal Mistress furiously lit up an untipped Milburn and Byers full-strength cigarette, blowing the smoke provocatively into her consort's regal features.

"So whose bloody idea is this?" she exploded. "Your bloody mother's, isn't it? After all this time, she's still treating me like a leper."

"No, no," Charles spluttered, wishing that a large brandy would magically appear in his hand to steady his nerves. "It's very difficult doing a seating plan. There's all sorts of protocol involved, what with the bride's mother, and all those bishops and marquesses and so on..." His faltering explanation petered out.

"So I'm just bloody Cinderella, am I?" Camilla blazed back at him. "And I'm expected to sit at the back with the footmen and the photographers. Well, I'll tell you what, Charles – I'm not bloody going – and nor are you."

And with that she hurled the new hat and shoes into the open fire in the bedroom where they were consumed in a sudden burst of flames.

As Charles looked at the fire miserably, he wondered whether this was a portent of what would happen to their love.

"After the great blaze," he mused, "would there be nothing left but ashes?"

© *The Gatwick Airport Collection 2004.*

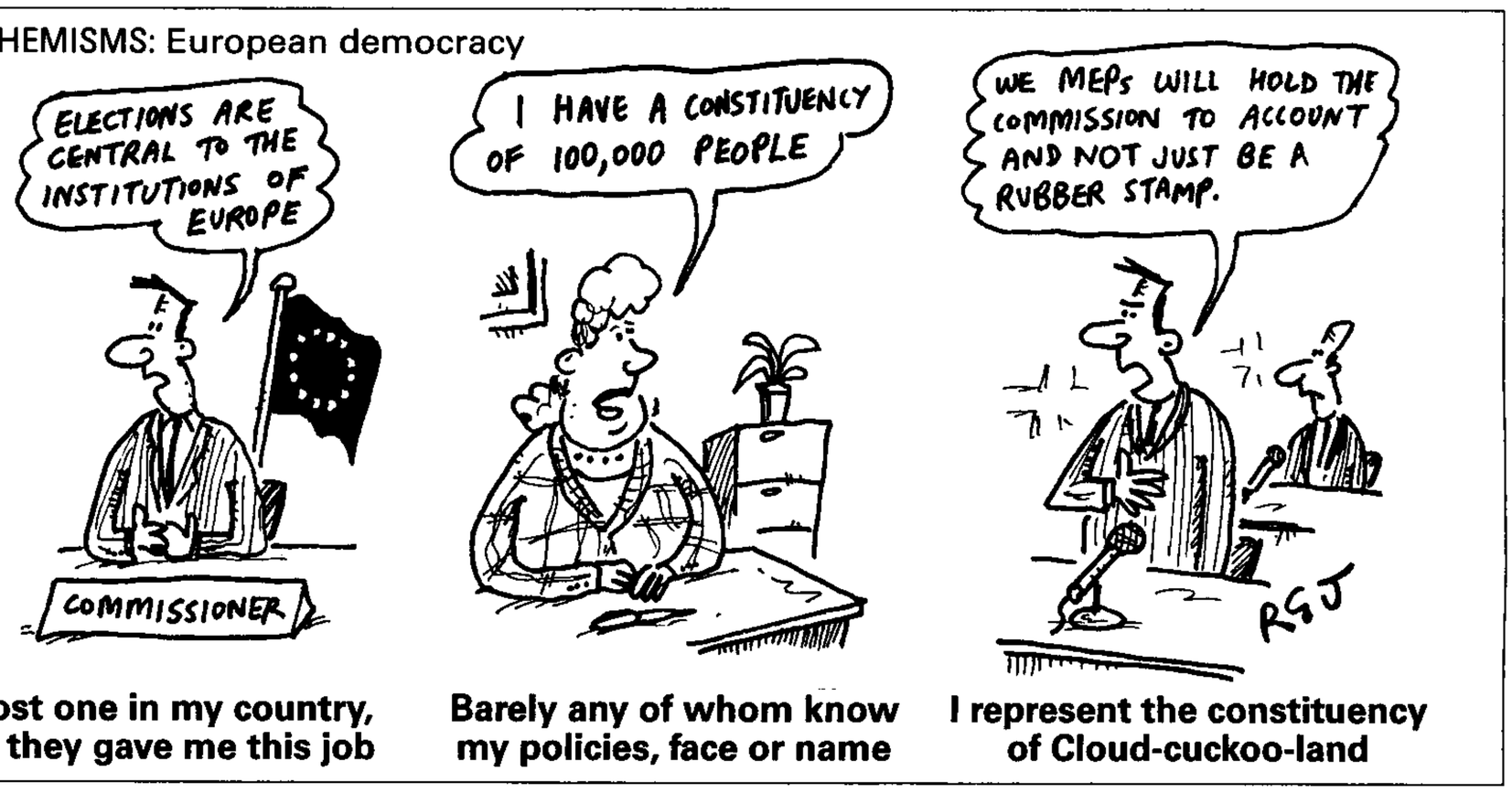
'CORPSE LIVE ON TV' SHOCK

by **Phil Airtime**

TV VIEWERS will now have the chance to see what a rotting corpse looks like as it slowly decays, by watching a television channel called 'Channel 4'.

"Channel 4 was once fresh and alive, and the home of groundbreaking drama, arts, documentaries and current affairs," said one critic. "But sadly it's now dead and every day you can tune in to see it rot just a little bit more *(cont. p. 94)*

EUPHEMISMS: European democracy


ELECTIONS ARE CENTRAL TO THE INSTITUTIONS OF EUROPE
COMMISSIONER
I HAVE A CONSTITUENCY OF 100,000 PEOPLE
WE MEPs WILL HOLD THE COMMISSION TO ACCOUNT AND NOT JUST BE A RUBBER STAMP.
RGJ

I lost one in my country, so they gave me this job

Barely any of whom know my policies, face or name

I represent the constituency of Cloud-cuckoo-land

AMERICAN ELECTION

WORLD LEADERS CONGRATULATE BUSH

ONCE IT became clear that George Bush had won a second term, world leaders immediately rang the President to congratulate him.

"Within minutes the President's closest friends in the international community were all on the phone, with Tony Blair, Vladimir Putin, Gerhard Schroeder and Osama bin Laden offering their heartfelt congratulations," said a senior White House *(cont. p. 94)*

SCENES OF DISMAY GREET THE RESULT

AS NEWS filtered through that Senator John Kerry had conceded defeat in Ohio, there were scenes of dismay right around the country as lawyers *(Surely 'Democrat Supporters'?)*, young and old, openly wept in the streets.

Lawyers *(Democrats? Ed.)* had waited four years for this night, and had hoped and prayed for weeks and perhaps months of highly-paid work *(Surely 'A real challenge in the direction of American politics'? Ed.)*.

For these men and women for whom the night offered so much cash *(Surely 'hope'? Ed.)* this truly was a terrible night in America to be a lawyer. *(You're fired. Ed.)*

LATE KERRY NEWS

JOHN KERRY says that following his election defeat, he plans to retire from politics and return to his family business.

"I'm looking forward to returning to my Easter Island home and resuming work there as a statue."

WHAT WE CAN EXPECT IN THE NEXT FOUR YEARS

From Our Washington Correspondent **Phil Space**

Over the next four years in the White House we can perhaps expect the Bush administration, with one eye on the history books, attempting to mend fences with the international community, but then again, bolstered by their victory, they may press on past Iraq and invade Iran and Syria, though then again, they may wish to concentrate on domestic issues and the economy... though then again, should the economy deteriorate, they may wish to deflect attention from the worsening economic outlook by engaging in more foreign adventures, but then, should the situation in Iraq worsen, domestic opinion may force them to work more closely with Governments in the Arab world, though should democratic elections in Iraq go ahead in January and be a success, then perhaps I can go to bed because it has been a very long night and *(cont. p. 94)*

HOW DEPRESSED ARE YOU?

TEN tell-tale signs that you have got the George Bush Blues:

❶ YOU'RE hiding under the table waiting for the world to end.

❷ YOU keep checking your pulse to find out if you are still alive.

❸ YOU stumble around the house mumbling "four more years" to yourself.

❹ YOU decide to become a muslim, to be on the safe side.

❺ YOU are worried that becoming a muslim might mean that George Bush invades your house.

❻ YOU renounce Islam and become an evangelical christian in the hope that your kitchen won't be bombed.

❼ YOU throw away your old Cat Stevens albums just in case.

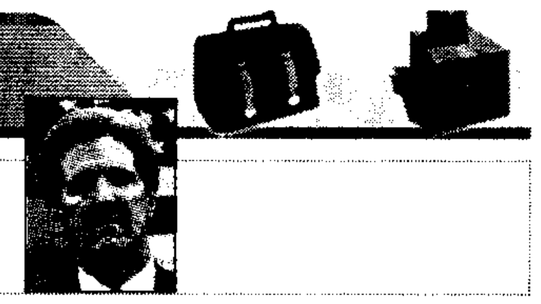
❽ YOU cancel your holidays in France, since it is now part of the axis of evil and may be nuked at any moment.

❾ YOU buy yourself an anti-chemical and biological weapons suit.

❿ YOU never want to hear Jim Naughtie's voice every again.

(That's enough depression. Ed.)

My eBay



i'mnumberone! (2)

Items I'm Selling (1-5 of 5 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ Flip-flops – men's, size 12	$9.99	$2.50	0
☐ Job lot – assorted rosettes, balloons, etc – inc. 4 tonnes tickertape	$199.99	buyer to collect	0
☐ Pocket calculator – some wear – needs new battery	$5.99	$2.00	0
☐ Rabbit's foot charm	$1.99	$1.99	0
☐ 'The West Wing' DVD – seasons 1-3 – unwanted gift	$9.99	$7.50	0

ROY of the RUGGERS
ROY HAS COME UP AGAINST SOME SERIOUS OPPOSITION - RUGBY PLAYERS!
GREAT THINKING ROY - TAKING ON SIX VERY LARGE MEN!
I'M GOING TO GET MY FUCKING HEADLINE
IT GOES VERY BADLY FOR ROY. BUT HE'S LEARNT HIS LESSON...
FROM NOW ON I'M GOING TO PICK ON SOMEONE MY OWN SIZE... OR SMALLER AND PREFERABLY FEMALE
COME ON YOU BLACK AND BLUES
J Porter

What You Will Hear

That Kinnock Maiden Speech In Full

Lord Kinnochio of Windbag: My Lords, Ladies and Lords. Pray silence for myself. And let me begin by totally and utterly refuting the claims which have been in the Tory press that I have at any time sought in any manner, shape or form, to abolish Your Lordships' chamber, which is a total and utter lie, as is any suggestion that I ever described your lordships and ladyships as a "bunch of clapped-out geriatric spongers who should all be strung-up." Because what I totally and utterly said was that my admiration for this noble and ancient house was utterly total and totally utter". And furthermore that throughout my long and distinguished life in public service my constant and unwavering dream has been that one day I should be privileged to take my seat in this historic chamber, redolent as it is of the rich tapestry which has bound these island peoples together for centuries past. And today I say to you, this is not the end of my maiden speech. It is not even the end of the beginning. But it is the begining of the end of the begining which I must...

All Noble Lords: Shut up, you old windbag, get back to Brussels. Some of us are trying to get some sleep.

© Hanz-z-z-z-z-ard

The Queen's Speech

What Her Majesty's Government plans to ban in the coming session:

☐ **A Bill to outlaw smacking in pubs and offices**

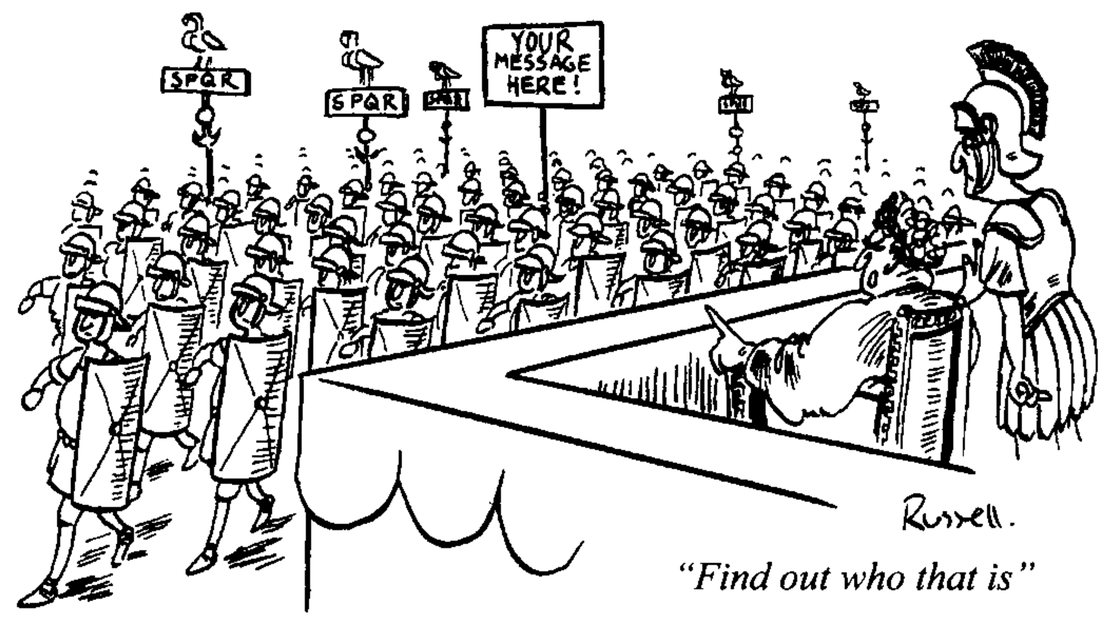
☐ **A Bill to outlaw smoking with dogs**

☐ **A Bill to outlaw smirking at frogs (under the EU's Racial Discrimination and Inflammatory Practices directive, 2004/29)**

☐ **A Bill to outlaw smoking in bogs, unless you are a consenting member of the Gay Community**

☐ **A Bill to permit "responsible" gambling in public toilets with dogs**

(That's enough Bills. Ed.)



"Find out who that is"

PHOTO CAMPAIGN SHOWS RAVAGES OF ADDICTION

A SHOCKING new photo campaign has been launched to warn people thinking of getting into hard politics of the dangers of getting addicted to power.

The pictures of a junkie identified only as "Tony", taken over a ten-year period, reveal the terrible ravages wrought on his once-beautiful face.

"It is not the board's role to allow pornography to enter the mainstream. This is something that David Blunkett should take a look at."

The Sunday Telegraph

TESSA JOWELL REVISITED

the PREMIERSH*TS

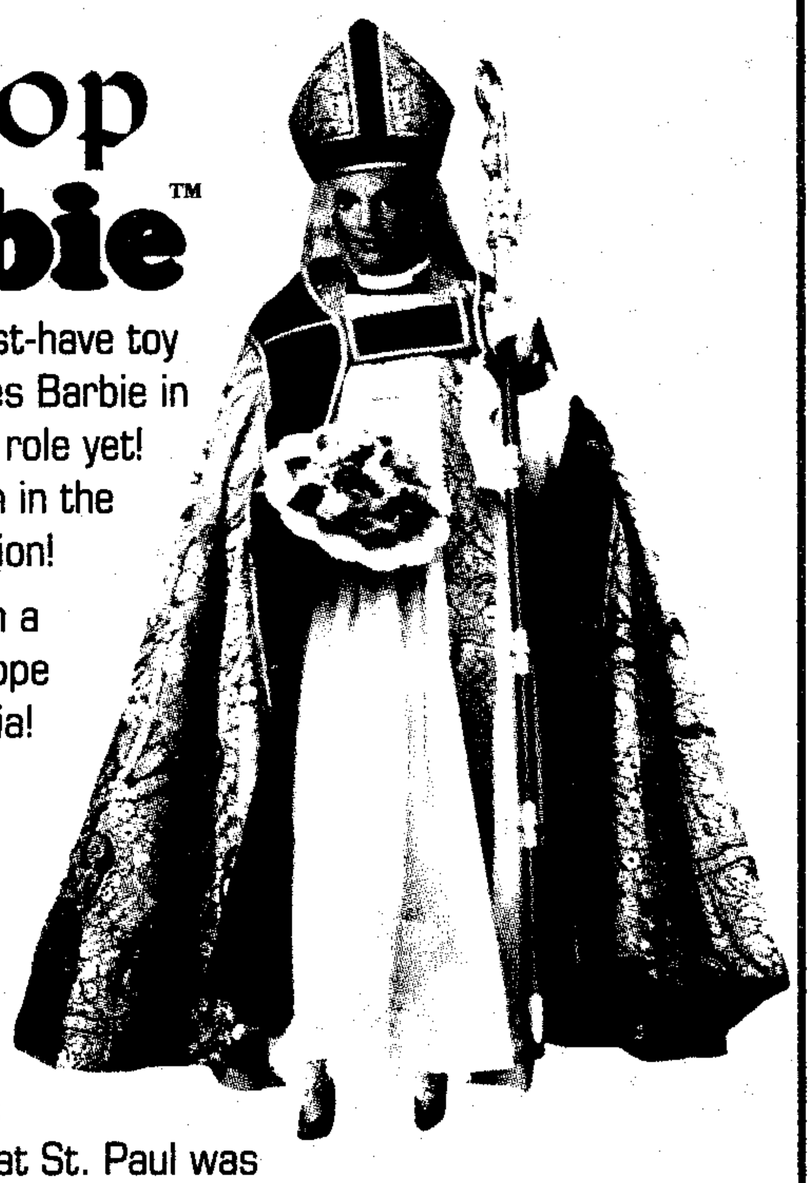
PAUL WOOLEY
THE SPAT BETWEEN ARSENAL AND MAN. UTD RAGES ON...
WENGER
FA
I HAVE HERE A REPORT SUBMITTED BY SIR ALEX REGARDING FOOD BEING THROWN AT HIM IN THE TUNNEL
YOU CAN'T BLAME ARSENAL FOR THAT, IT'S ALL DOWN TO ROONEY DIVING!
OCH THE NOO!
COLE
DIVE--
ROONEY
FUCK, MISSED HIM!

Advertisement

COMING SOON!

Yes, it's

Bishop Barbie™



This year's must-have toy for Christmas sees Barbie in her most exciting role yet! Creating a schism in the Anglican communion!

Dress her up in a fantastic mitre, cope 'n' episcopal regalia! Hours of fun!

Then pit her against FLYING BISHOP KEN™ who is considering leaving the church on the grounds that St. Paul was against female ordination and he believes strongly in an all-male apostolic succession!

Pull Bishop Barbie's string and hear her denounce Ken as a misogynist dinosaur who is probably having difficulty coming to terms with his own sexuality!

New from

"Toys 'R' CofE"!

£199.99 from all leading department stores

If you have hearing difficulties and wish to have the transcripts sent to you regularly, please register with the Visually Impaired Media Unit at the Inland Revenue.

Inland Revenue website

That Anglo-German Royal Banquet Menu

EVA BRAUN WINDSOR SOUP

❁

SAUER KRAUT IN CARP
COLD-ITZ SHOULDER OF GERMAN BEEF

❁

REICH PUDDING
BOMBE HARRIS
LUFTWAFFLES

❁

FROM THE CLEESEBOARD
EDAM-BUSTERS

❁

SSPRESSO

❁

A SELECTION OF GERMAN WINES
HANDE HOCK, QUIESLING

BLAIR'S WAR ADVICE

Forgotten Royal Dies

by Hugh Montgomery-Massivesnob

PRINCESS Marjorie Lavinia Aloysia Starborgling of Worcester died today, aged 138.

She was the youngest of 13 daughters to the 5th Earl of Pangbourne, and a grand-niece of Queen Adelaide, the second cousin of Queen Victoria.

In 1908, the then Lady Marjorie Starborgling married Prince Cecil, Duke of Worcester, in a glittering society wedding at St Margaret's, Westminster, described by the Morning Post as "the most glittering society wedding of the century".

At the reception afterwards, the guest list included every crowned head in Europe and the cream of the Edwardian aristocracy, headed by the Dukes of Hertfordshire, Herefordshire and Hampshire, and the Dowager Marchioness of Dorking *(Get on with the story. Ed.)*

Intensely shy and reserved, Princess Marjorie never played a leading role in society herself, preferring as she did to remain in her beloved garden at Brooms, where for many years she cultivated a large area of grass which she called her "beloved lawn".

In later years she developed a keen interest in antique fountain pens, amassing a collection which filled several rooms in the East Wing of her husband's baronial mansion in Glenmorangie.

In 1921 she made a rare departure from her customary life of solitude when she paid an informal royal visit to the Gambia, where she was received by the Governor, Sir Archibald Pontefract-Starborgling, a distant relative of her husband.

Together they made a sporting foray into the jungle, where Sir Archibald shot a record number of tree-dwelling meerkats. A picture of this historic achievement was later published in the *Illustrated London News* under the heading 'Princess Sees Record Bag By Governor'.

She recorded the event in her diary (as yet unpublished) in the following memorable passage:

"June 15. Frightfully warm for the time of year. Archie says he has a real treat in store for me today. I am to be allowed to watch him shoot meerkat. Most enjoyable. Went to bed early with a slight headache."

After the death of her beloved husband in 1938, Princess Marjorie became something of a recluse, shunning the limelight which other members of the Royal Family were not loath to embrace.

In 1960 she made a visit to Harrods, where she was greeted by the then manager Mr Smidgett, who mistook her for the Queen Mother.

"Don't worry," she wittily riposted. "People are always doing that." She often regaled visitors to Brooms with this story in later years, to general hilarity.

The Duchess at the Coronation *(arrowed)*

Perhaps her greatest achievement in an age when Royalty was to become almost synonymous with gossip was to remain entirely free from any breath of scandal.

Through many decades her name was never mentioned in the press, a fact which delighted her to the point where she would collect newspapers in which she had not been mentioned, as proof of her dedication to her royal duty.

She did, however, attract a paragraph in the *Evesham & Pershore Evening Echo* when she donated her fountain pen collection to the local Museum of the Written Word (formerly the Sackville-West Moth Museum).

On hearing of her death yesterday, one acquaintance said *(contd p. 94)*

Peel Collection For British Library

Culture Minister Hails 'Historic Bequest'

by Our Arts Correspondent **"D.J." Taylor**

NOT SINCE it acquired the Elgin Marbles in the 19th Century has the British Museum received such a priceless bequest as the gift, announced yesterday, of the unique collection of CDs and vinyls assembled over the years by one of the greatest cultural figures of the 20th Century, the late John Peel.

When Mr Peel died last month, tributes to his lifetime of artistic achievement poured in from every corner of the globe, praising his unique sense of musical taste and his unerring instinct for identifying every major musical movement of the twentieth century – punk, funk, junk, hip-hop, flip-flop, slip-slop, garage, council house, indie, daily telegraph, dance, trance, pot, shit, fusion, fission, fashion and, of course, spam.

The Peel Archive, which now runs to some 25 million separate musical items, includes some of the rarest recordings in the entire history of music. Among them are:

- the 1962 demo pressing of *Ton-Up Kid* by Tom and the Tom Men
- the 1968 Kaleidoscope Dreamscape album by the Exploding Yoghurt Band, which only sold one copy
- 1977, *Fuckya* by Sadie Nix & The Nickers, which Peel was the first DJ to promote against stiff opposition from BBC bosses
- 1987, The Techno Monks of Hilversum Abbey with their plainsong arrangement of Geoffrey de Bindman's *Te Deum* with a drum-and-bass backing.

(That's enough terrible records. Ed.)

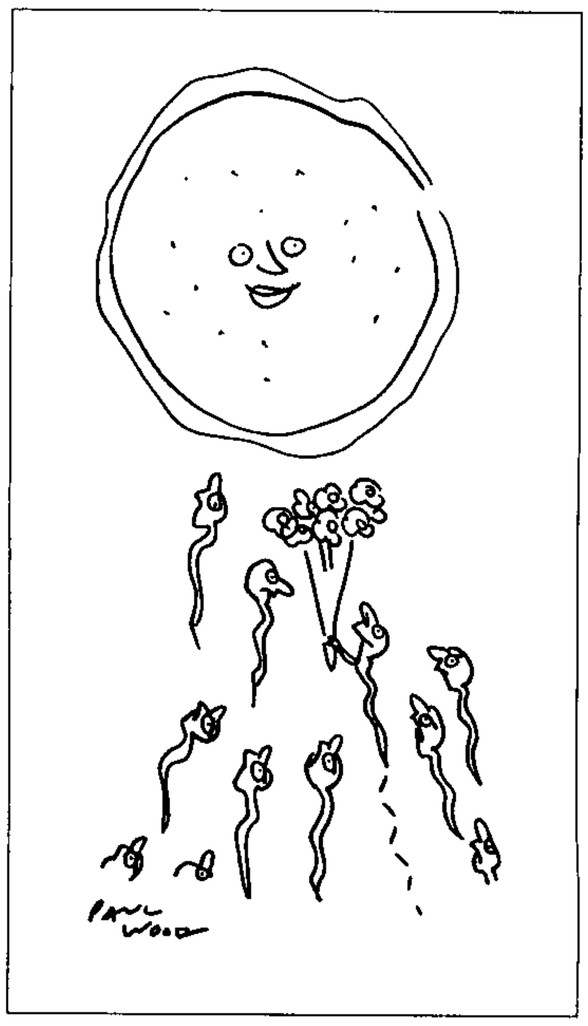
KNACKER BACKS FIREARMS OFFICERS

by Our Police Staff **Phil Grave**

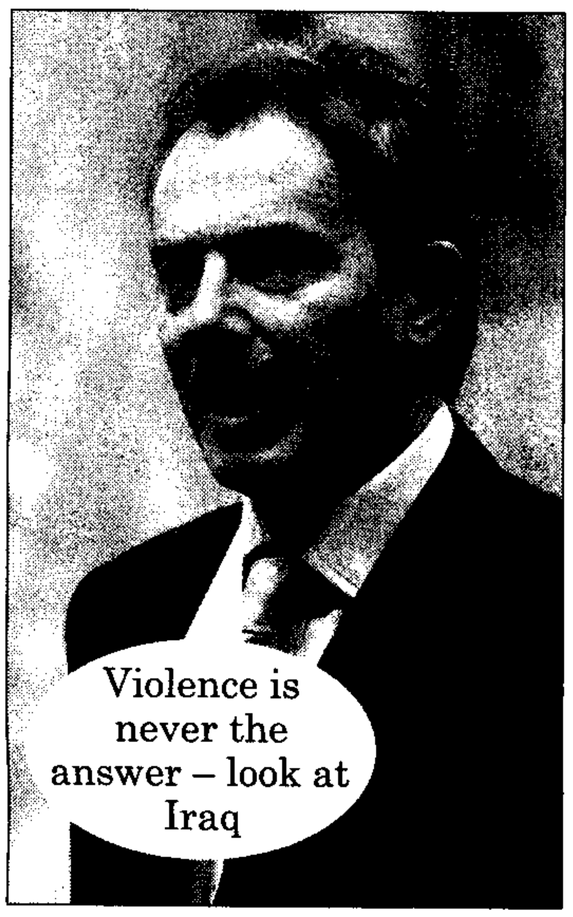
INSPECTOR Knacker of the Yard today supported the decision of firearms officers to go on strike, following the suspension of two officers for shooting an unarmed man carrying a table leg.

"The public have to be protected," he said, "and the removal of all armed police officers from the streets is the best possible way to protect them."

Sir Ian Blair is 107.



SMACKING BAN



DIARY

EWAN McGREGOR & CHARLEY BOORMAN

Ewan McGregor: I'd had enough of being the big Hollywood star. I wanted to get away from all that so-called "celebrity" bollocks and truly find myself by riding a motorbike the whole way round the world. Fast-forward three months, and the dream had come true: I was setting off on a voyage into the unknown on a new bike kindly donated by BMW, followed by a couple of camera crews for a six-hour TV series and guaranteed tie-in book deal, with extra back-up provided by an office staff in London and local footwork left to our estimable fixer, Karina. Yes, I was now free of the shackles of Hollywood superstardom. Out on the open road at long last. Just me. My old friend Charley. And everyone else.

Charley Boorman: Vroom-fuckin'-vroom! We were gonna ride those fuckin' hot BMW babes like there was no tomorrow! And we were gonna take in one whole lot of fuckin' world on the way, ready to slam a real beautiful travel book down on the page when we got fuckin' back.

We revved off from London at top speed, greedy for travel experience. France was almost as French as I remembered it, and Belgium was much the same as France, only smaller. Germany was full of Germans, but these days the war is over and they're a peaceloving nation so they didn't give us any fuckin' shit.

So by late afternoon we were in the Czech republic – not like Germany at all, or at least not much – and by that evening we had made finally made it to Slovakia, which was like the Czech republic, only with a bumpier road. Fuckin' magic!

Ewan McGregor: After just one day's ride, we'd managed to put literally hundreds of miles under those wheels. And we had already witnessed things I would never forget. The white lines along the road, all the way to Dover. The broken traffic light in Brussels, or was it Prague? That beautiful stretch of dual carriageway just outside Berlin. In Slovakia, Charley and I talked late into the night about our great adventure so far. "Jeez!" I said to Charley, "Remember when we put our bikes on that fuckin' train and rammed straight through that fuckin' tunnel?" "Christ – yeah!" enthused Charley. "And when it stopped – jeez! – there we were in fuckin' France!"

"And then we kept riding all day through somewhere and somewhere else – and here we are in wherever!"

"Unfor-fuckin'-gettable, man!"

Charley Boorman: The Ukraine was a bit bumpy, but Kazakhstan proved unexpectedly smooth, with excellent visibility. While we drove towards Mongolia, I thought of other great biking trips I'd been on, and all those great memories.

Like, I was once driving in America when I met this English guy on a bike that looked just like fuckin' mine.

"What's yours?" I asked him.

"A GZXR-750," came his reply.

"A GZXR-750?" I said. "Holy -fuckin'-shit! Can you believe it? That's what mine is too!"

"But mine's got RP2-11 stabilisers with 350/L double density terminators," he said.

"Jeezus-fuckin'-H-Christ!" I said, "Snap-arooni!" I forget where we were exactly – somewhere like the Grand Canyon? – but it's an extraordinary, beautiful moment of serendipity that I will always about carry with me, like a beautiful woman.

Ewan McGregor: Never have I felt so totally alone as I did amidst the unforgettable splendour of the magnificent landscape of golden hills bathed in the beautiful morning light, glistening like gold. The sheer beauty of it took my breath away, and I sighed a deep sigh of satisfaction. "Could you repeat that deep sigh, Ewan, love?" said our great producer, Dave. It would have been a shame to lose it, but luckily, the second camera crew were present to capture my spine-tingling moment of solitude for the wider television audience.

Riding into the barren wastes on my BMW with my i-Pod in my ear, tapping into my GPS to find the nearest hotel, my mobile rang. It was our support staff in London. "You know what?" I exclaimed, emotionally, "It's truly amazing to be this far from civilisation."

Charley Boorman: We drove through the night, deeper and deeper into the pitch darkness. It was really really dark all around us. We didn't need anyone to tell us that this was fuckin' night-time – you could see it from the way it was so dark.

"It's dark, isn't it, dude?" I said to Ewan when we got to where we were getting.

"Dark," he repeated. "Very dark."

"Jeez – but I guess we'll get some daylight in the fuckin' morning," I said, "Otherwise we won't see anything. It's that dark. Dark. Dark. Dark. Y'know, dude, that's the worst thing about night-time: it's so fuckin' dark."

At last I realised I only needed five more words to complete the day's quota.

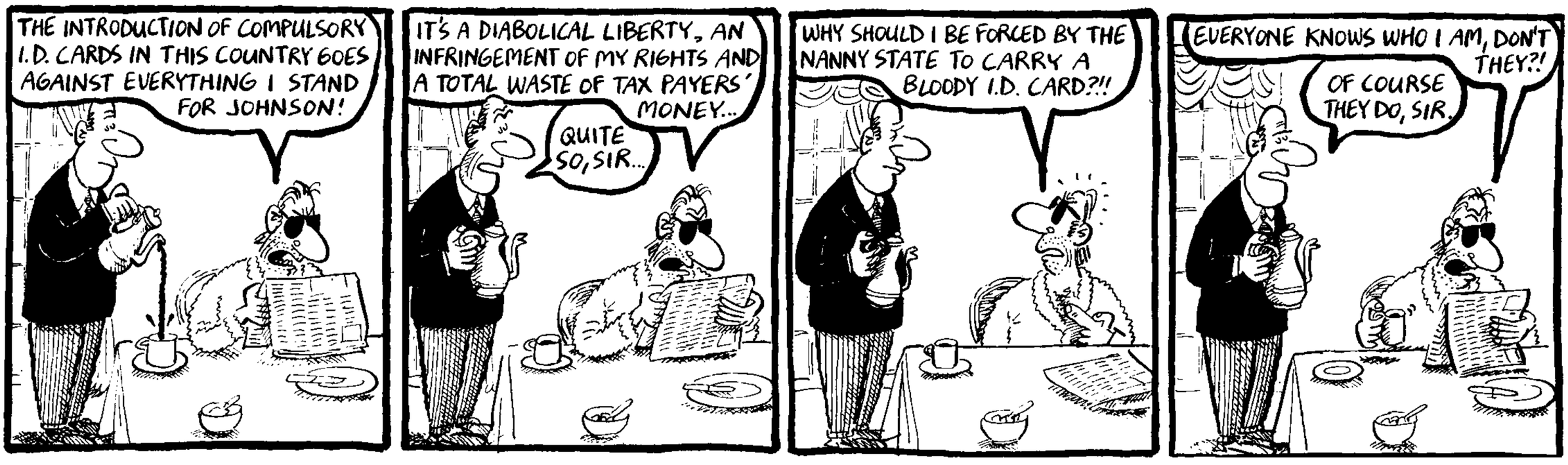
"Dark. Talk about fuckin' dark.".

Ewan McGregor: After one or two hair-raising adventures – one day, our mobile completely lost touch with our support staff in Shepherds Bush, and another day we had to wait while a wee herd of real-life sheep crossed the road! – it wasn't long before we found ourselves in Alaska, which turned out to be as cold as they say. Then we put our feet down and biked fit to bust through Canada – hey, what a country! – down into the USofA. After a series of mishaps – nearly running out of petrol near Detroit! – we reached the Big Apple.

Charley Boorman: Riding into New York I was struck, not for the first time, by how busy it is, and how many sky-scrapers there are: it's the city that never sleeps, a bit like Beijing or Vladivostock, and Dublin's quite similar too.

Ewan McGregor: It was a time for reflection. As our trip had progressed, our experiences felt deeper and more intense but somehow also less pointed, though in other ways more curved, but with a jagged edge to them. I had travelled not only round the world, but deep inside myself, and now I was out the other side. I mentioned this to Charley. He thought, then said, "You're fuckin' deep, man". You know, I don't think I've ever loved the guy as much as I did at that moment.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


THE INTRODUCTION OF COMPULSORY I.D. CARDS IN THIS COUNTRY GOES AGAINST EVERYTHING I STAND FOR JOHNSON!
IT'S A DIABOLICAL LIBERTY, AN INFRINGEMENT OF MY RIGHTS AND A TOTAL WASTE OF TAX PAYERS' MONEY...
QUITE SO, SIR...
WHY SHOULD I BE FORCED BY THE NANNY STATE TO CARRY A BLOODY I.D. CARD?!!
EVERYONE KNOWS WHO I AM, DON'T THEY?!
OF COURSE THEY DO, SIR.

Literary Review

Dunn moanin'

Eleanor Rigby

Douglas Coupland

(Fourth Estate, £15.99)

THE Canadian writer Douglas Coupland made a name for himself with *Generation X*, an achingly hip first novel that instantly got him hailed as a zeitgeist-spotter. It dissected the world of post-yuppie slackerdom and gave us the word "McJob" for the sort of work its characters did or would rather not do.

It was followed by *Shampoo Planet*, which offered more of the same only less. More books followed, including *Microserfs*, a dissection of feudal bondage among the (Bill) Gated programming community. Coupland's most recent novel, *Hey Nostradamus!* logged on to the vogue for high school massacres which proved such a (Booker prize) winning formula for D.B.C. Pierre's *Vernon God Little* (see *Eye* 1092).

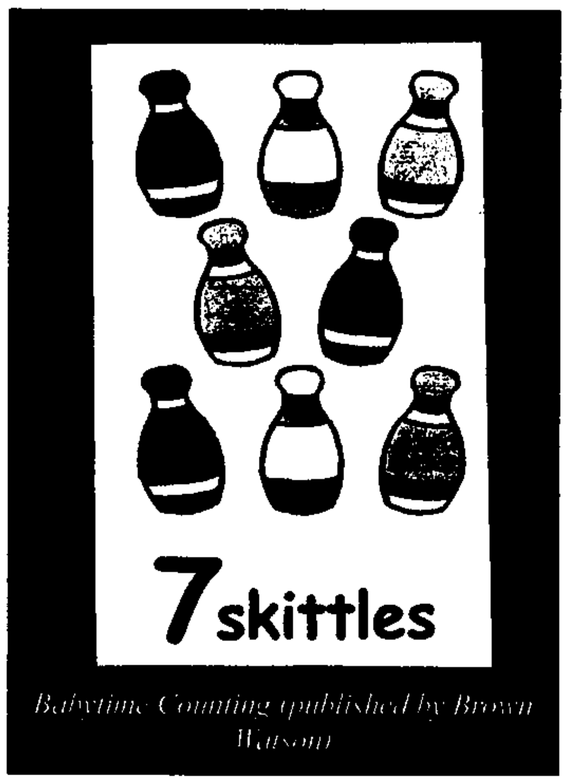
Now we have *Eleanor Rigby*, which logs on to something rather less hip and zeitgeisty, namely the Beatles' most conservative song. "All the lonely people," it wonders, "where do they all belong?" Well, one of them belongs in Vancouver, with a dreary job and a featureless flat to go home to. Her name is Liz Dunn but she uses the title of that Beatles song as her email address. As a narrator she is uncomfortably aware of her function in this book, which is to represent the very concept of loneliness, as a medium for some of Coupland's observations on the subject. She is a blank, a cultural construct rather than a character. That she's fat, "unsalvageably plain" and has red hair is mentioned more than once, but these attributes are irrelevant. Her family is, she says, "generic". Even her loneliness is only of tangential importance to the plot, which is more to do with missing than lonely people.

The novel shifts back and forth in time, so that in between plodding through dull days at work and long empty evenings at home, we are offered slightly more exciting scenes from the past and, eventually, a projected future. At the age of 12 Liz discovered a dead body by the railway line, severed at the waist, top half dressed as a man, bottom half as a woman. Gruesome, yes; but also deeply symbolic, you see, pay attention all you book group enthusiasts, because Liz too has been severed from her other half, or halves, as we duly discover. Later she takes to breaking into people's houses, without taking anything, just haunting them like the ghost, or absent person, she is.

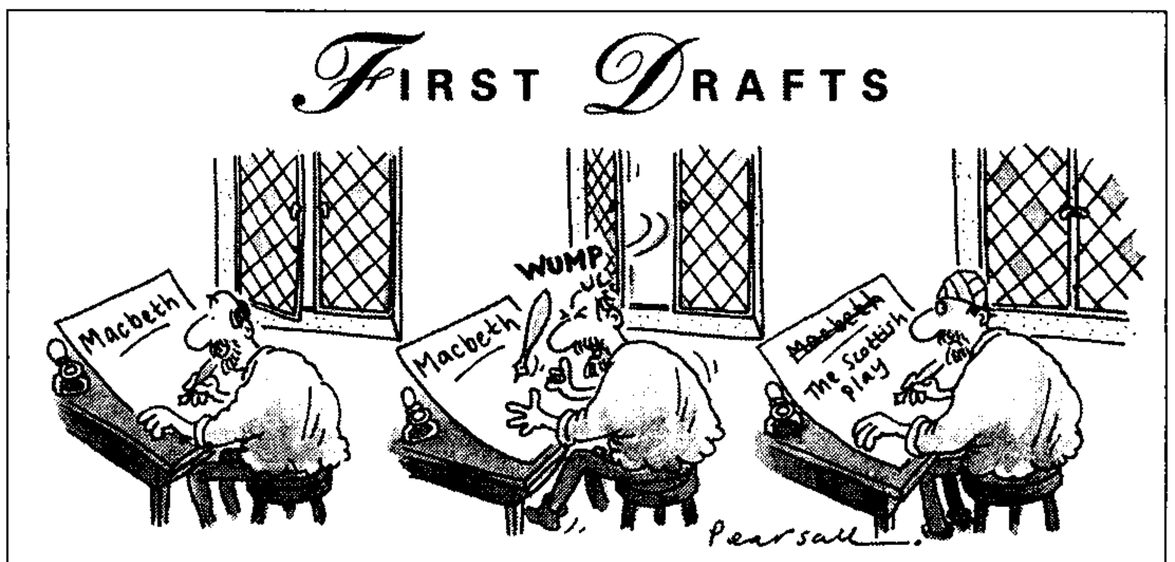
Then we discover that at the age of 16 she secretly had, and gave up for adoption, a child whose conception she cannot even remember. It happened at a drunken party on a roof during a school trip to Rome. Now 20, her son suddenly reappears, improbably handsome and charming, but cruelly stricken with multiple sclerosis, a "leper messiah" who all too soon dies, just as his long lost family has learnt to accept him.

So the missing son is missing again. But now we get to hear from the long lost father, an Austrian dentist who fills in the gaps about that long ago drunken (but in a sense immaculate) night on the tiles in Rome. He's a bit weird; but it seems that's only because he too has been searching for his missing half. With their body parts reassembled, they can both stop being neurotic loners and live happily, or at any rate less neurotically, ever after.

Coupland, however, is not just a writer, though. He's also an artist, and as such has curated a show currently on at Canada House. The show consists of objects representing his nation's unique cultural contribution to the world. It's quite a small exhibition (one room only), which in a way is rather sad. The iconic objects include Canada geese, coins, old beer cans and lumberjack shirts. But you can also see examples of Coupland's own work, such as his lamps made of old fishing floats, and bits of furniture made of old packing cases and other found objects. Where do they all come from? Where do they all belong etc. etc?



Babytime Counting published by Brown Watson



Shakespeare

LIBRARY NEWS

■ "THE new standards are fewer in number, but no less stretching," claimed libraries minister Andrew McIntosh, announcing the slashing of the standards for acceptable service in public libraries from 26 targets to just ten.

The ten remaining targets were pretty much all on the "old" list, itself drawn up just three years ago. So what are these new standards?

Gone is the target for 65 percent of library visitors to report success in obtaining a specific book; and gone too is the target for 75 percent to successfully gain the information they sought from a search or inquiry. Also gone is the target for 95 percent of visitors to rate the knowledge of staff as good or very good – but perhaps that fits with the abandoning of the old target of providing appropriate levels of qualified staff.

Instead there will simply be a woollier target of 95 percent of users saying the library is good or very good, with no measure at all of what they mean by "good". Local authorities have been told they can keep using the old standards for their own internal management if they want, but that the slimmed down new targets will "not impose an unreasonable administrative burden". So how exactly is that "no less stretching"?

Djinn fizz

Children of the Lamp: The Akhenaten Adventure

P.B. Kerr

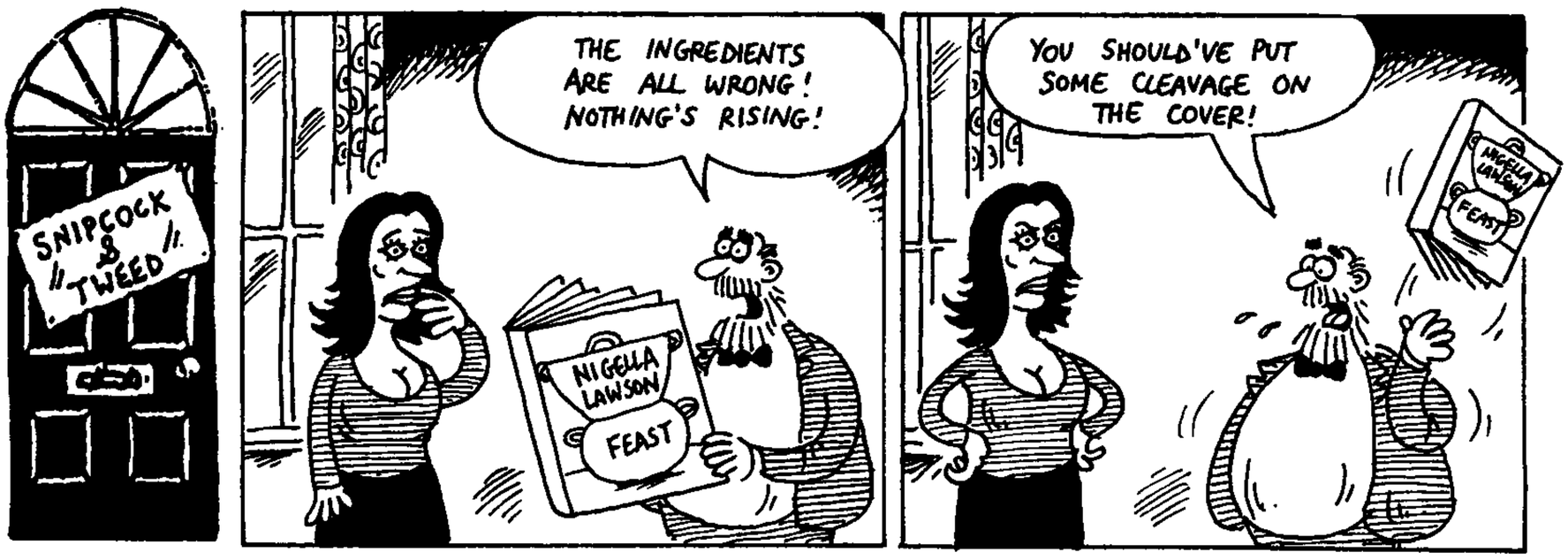
(Scholastic Press, £12.99)

WITH the Harry Potter phenomenon showing no sign of slowing down and Tolkien still accounting for a vast percentage of bookseller turnover, children's books remain one of the hippest items on the publishing block.

Wannabes abound, and Scholastic recently forked out a million pounds for "P.B. Kerr's" Children of the Lamp series, of which this is the first, much-advertised tranche. And "P.B. Kerr" is, who exactly? Writers – debutant writers especially – are not usually known for their shy modesty, their dislike of lavish photographs of themselves and clamorous back-jacket CVs – yet apart from a solitary end-paper sentence directing correspondents to an email address, the author of The Akhenaten Adventure is to all intents and purposes anonymous.

As it happens, "P.B. Kerr" (think J.K. Someone) is none other than the novelist Philip Kerr, the story of whose previous career is not, as Anthony Powell might have put it, without all intrinsic interest. Back in the 90s our man – a Best of British Young Novelist, no less – wrote a stack of up-market thrillers for such firms as Random House and the Orion Group. The books did moderately well, but Kerr's real talent lay in his ability to sell screenplays of them to Hollywood. His take in this run of big-money transactions was estimated at around $9m. Mysteriously, none of the films got made and the high-grade thrillers lapsed, whereupon PB decided to apply himself to the juvenile end of the market.

Kerr's grown-up novels were noted for their professionalism, a procedural expertise occasionally so glacial in tone as to exclude much in the way of human emotion. The Akhenaten Adventure, consequently, is exceedingly clever, exceedingly well worked out and, should you happen to be a child, extremely patronising. Featuring a pair of precocious 12-year-old American twins named John and Philippa Gaunt (they would have to be American) who live in Manhattan with their investment banker pop and glamour-puss mom, it is transparently the work of someone who has read a great many children's books and imagines that he



sees how the trick is done.

Harry Potter is a wizard, the talent passed on unbeknownst to him by his murdered parents. John and Philippa turn out to be djinns (pantherine Mrs Gaunt is the carrier, natch, not short-arse dad) nudged to "the threshold of a kind of awakening" by the simultaneous arrival of their wisdom teeth. Cue a series of devious premonitions. In their dental-anaesthetic dreams they are jointly bidden to London by weird uncle Nimrod; "Mrs Trump" the Manhattan daily – nice touch, that – scoops a fortune on the lottery; while the holidaying couple sitting alongside on the Heathrow-bound plane are unexpectedly teleported back to Poughkeepsie. Fetched up in London with Uncle Nimrod – you know he's English as he drives, or is driven in, a Rolls and says "What what?" – explanations are vouchsafed, whereupon they jet off to Egypt on a hunt for some newly uncovered artefacts.

There are, of course, baddies (the highly sinister Ifrit), chases and a larksome finale amongst the sarcophagi of the British Museum, but hanging above this jaunty confection is the scent of much ulterior design. PB clearly has his eye on the worldwide market, as he specialises in those curiously non-specific and therefore anodyne international similes – Mrs Gaunt's conversation sparkling like a crystal chandelier, the children's teeth as even as a row of parked cars and so on.

There is lots of beetle-browed lecturing on subjects as diverse as The Arabian Nights, the djinn heritage and Pharaonic history, and even Poughkeepsie ("as everybody knows") stands revealed as a small city outside New York where they make electric light-bulbs. The Egyptian hangers-on have amusing names like "Baksheesh" and "Toeragh" but the best gag glances back to Kerr's own reported friendships with Hollywood celebrities. This has Philippa, who post-wisdom teeth has instantly grown an inch and a half, measuring herself against a "Short People in Hollywood Chart" between Tom Cruise and Robert De Niro. Meanwhile, The Akhenaten Adventure is one of those all-too carefully wrought items written not for children but at them.

Books & Bookmen

■ AFTER a six-year investigation into corruption and racism in Scotland Yard, Michael Gillard and Laurie Flynn have brought out their long-awaited expose, *Untouchables*.

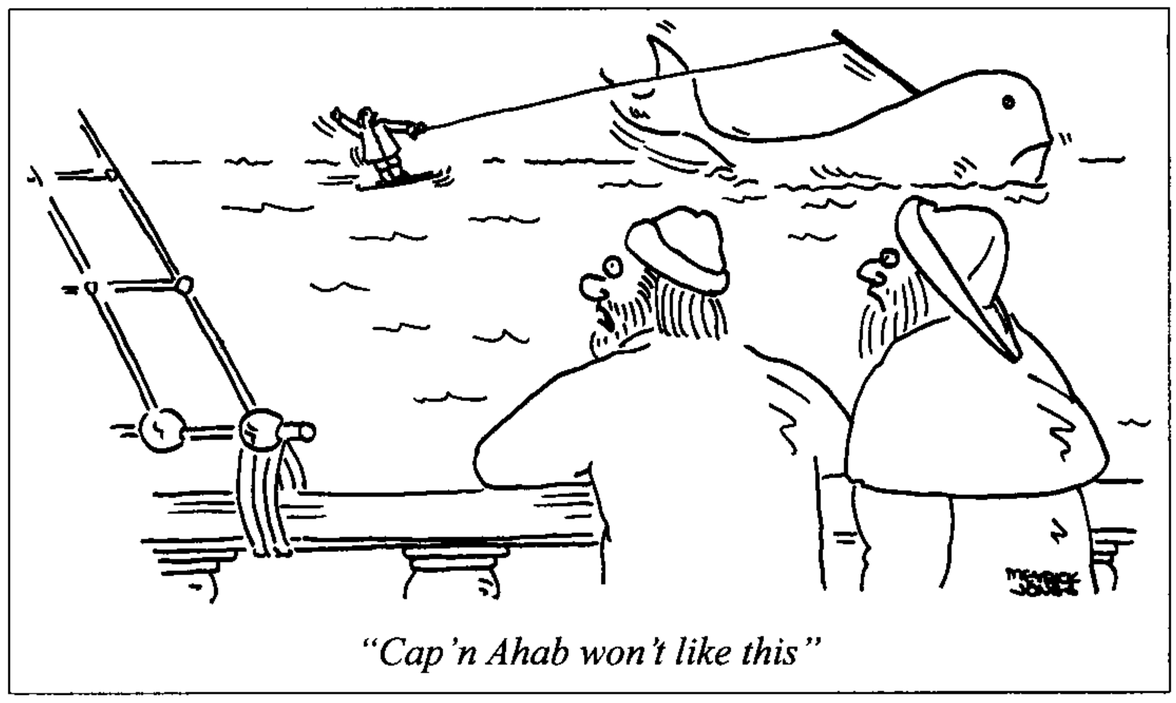
The book reveals cover-ups, miscarriages of justice and double standards employed by the Met during what the two authors describe as its "phoney war" on corruption. It looks at several controversial cases -- such as the murders of Stephen Lawrence, Jill Dando and Damilola Taylor -- as well as other high profile crimes like the £26m Brinks Matt robbery which still dogs Scotland Yard 21 years after the event.

Deputy assistant commissioner Alan Brown helpfully alerted all officers who feature, for better or worse, to the book's launch last month in the House of Commons. "Whilst it is controversial it will not be the subject of any injunctive action by the commissioner." Must all be true then...

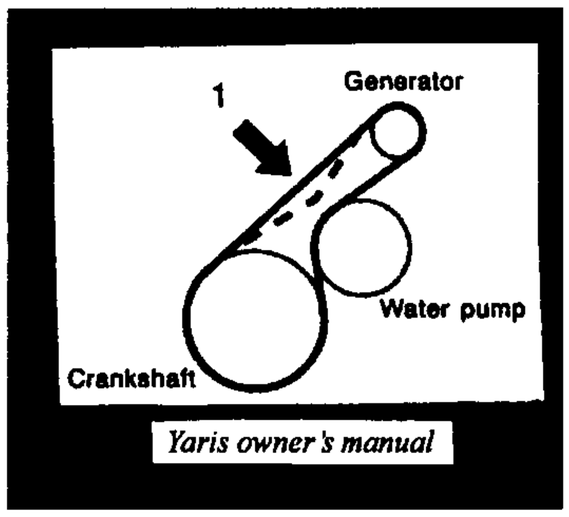
■ HIS first post-Booker column the *Observer*'s literary editor Robert McCrum took a strangely hostile attitude to the prize's sponsors, the Man Group, which he described as "an obscure but self-important City company".

Why such hostility to a company which a week earlier he had described as "a funky Canadian hedge fund"? It surely couldn't have had anything to do with the fact that the Man Group chairman Harvey McGrath had used his speech at the award dinner to upbraid McCrum. Man, McGrath intoned as if admonishing an ignorant pupil, was happy to be called funky – but it was neither Canadian nor a hedge fund. Oooh!

'Bookworm'



"Cap'n Ahab won't like this"



Warballs

● "So what will replace sex as the greatest marketing tool? Many advertisers point to humour as a great magnet. Playful puns, slapstick comedy, witty subtext: as in real life courtships, a humorous approach can seduce far more often than an in-your-face attempted pick-up. A new, more playful advertising would also tap into our post-11 September anxiety: we want to purchase security for ourselves and our loved ones, and a playful format offers the familiar comfort of childish days."
— Cristina Odone, the Times.

● "For Strike founder Michael Schrieber, it's all about 'plain, simple fun'. Indeed, he believes some of bowling's new-found popularity in the US can be traced to the aftermath of 11 September 2001 as people sought out 'social, more grounding experiences'."
— Australian Financial Review.

Pseuds Corner

To be modern is to be deluded by the dream of technological escape from our human condition. The games are neither art nor sport: they are ontological prosthetics, artificial extensions into alternate conditions of being, independent of our rotting biological carcasses. They remain, for the moment, only games. But they point to something more, to the possibility of ridding ourselves of the dying animal to which, like Yeats, sick with desire, we are fastened.

BRYAN APPLEYARD on video games
Sunday Times

...a politics of mourning, which, in our view, demands immediate negotiation

The death of Jacques Derrida, subject of a forthcoming conference on 'Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy', sponsored by the University of Wales

10.15 Late Junction

Fiona Talkington revisits last year's I Trawl the Megahertz by former Prefab Sprout Paddy McAloon. Plus Ingbrigt Haker Flaten's improvisation for double bass on Gershwin's I Loves You, Porgy, and Helge Sten, also known as Deathprod, with his Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha.

Radio Three schedules

The rest of the animal kingdom must bow before him, because there is nothing else like it in nature. No dolphin jumping for a ball; no monkey hurling a nut; no archer fish catching a fly with his sputum dart – no other species can solve such a complicated, three-dimensional problem with such speed, and, of our own species, Beckham is the supreme exponent.

He was five or six yards outside the penalty box to the left... [continues]

BORIS JOHNSON
Daily Telegraph

A gallery owner has created a stir by encouraging visitors to an exhibition of nudes to strip off to help them feel closer to the art. Kevin Money, 39, is offering 25 per cent off any purchases of works from the Bodyline exhibition at Gallery 39 in Swindon, Wiltshire, to anyone who bares all.

Encouraging customers to strip off was a way of helping them to experience the art in a more profound way, said Mr Money. "We're hoping that people will come in, look at the paintings and say 'I've got a body, I'm not ashamed of it.'"

Northern Echo

Pseuds Educational

Achievement will be recorded on transcripts designed for use by learners in a variety of settings, to give end-users easily accessible information about the range of learners' achievements across their programmes, especially at key transition points.

From the Tomlinson Report

The future prosperity of our nation is vested in the knowledge economy in a global context. To fulfil our potential we must exploit the untapped talents of groups suffering aspirational poverty and achieve congruence between the development of higher order skills through our educational systems and the future needs of our advanced technological society. The Vice-Chancellor explores the challenges inherent in these goals.

Invitation to a lecture to be delivered by PROFESSOR TIM WILSON, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hertfordshire

CONTRIBUTORS: Holly Gallacher, Professor J.D. Armstrong, Philip Conford, Joanna Burnett, Alex Lock, Dr David James, Andrew Grant

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE DEATH OF HARRY STANLEY

Shots in the dark

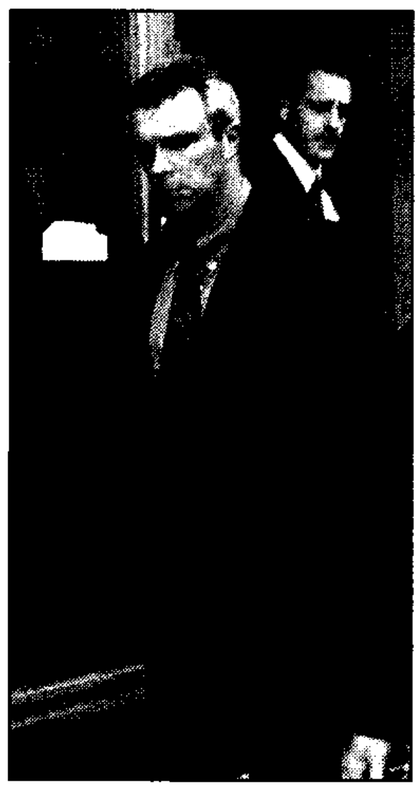
THE decision of Scotland Yard and the home secretary to yield to pressure from striking firearms officers in the Metropolitan police following the "unlawful" shooting of Harry Stanley is alarming. As the Stanley family's solicitor, Daniel Machover, says, putting armed police officers beyond the law and jury system usually only happens in a military dictatorship.

However, Met chiefs are to reconsider the suspension from duty of the two officers involved in the fatal shooting and have called for greater protection from prosecution for armed officers. They say officers now need to tackle growing gun crime by fighting "fire with fire" and, in the wake of 11 September, may well have to confront "suicide bombers and suicide attackers".

True or not, this completely ignores the facts surrounding the death of Mr Stanley and the inquest jury's finding that he had been unlawfully shot. Mr Stanley, 46, was recovering from cancer and walking home from the pub after a pint. He was carrying a newly repaired table-leg in a plastic bag; but police had been wrongly tipped off that the Scotsman was in fact Irish and carrying a gun in a bag.

Following the "strike" by firearms officers and sloppy reporting of the inquest proceedings, the public has been left with the impression that the Stanley case was about two officers being forced to make a split second decision about opening fire because they were in fear for their lives. But after hearing the evidence, that is exactly what the jury decided was *not* the case.

The jury rejected the claims by Inspector Neil Sharman (pictured right) and PC Kevin Fagan that they were acting in self defence and using reasonable force. Moreover, it was spelt out to the jury that they would have to be convinced that the two officers had concocted their account of the encounter with Mr Stanley before they could bring in a damning verdict like unlawful killing. After a long and stressful deliberation (one juror was in tears) this was precisely the verdict the jury returned.



The officers maintained that when they challenged Mr Stanley he turned round, grasped one end of the table leg and pointed the other at Fagan. But Mr Stanley's fatal head wound showed an entry wound to the back and left side of his head. It was fired by Sharman from behind at an angle of 110° degrees – indicating that Stanley was beginning to turn towards Sharman, not Fagan. Fagan was standing to Sharman's right, putting him even further behind Stanley and out of range of any pointed "weapon".

Tim Owen, the Stanley family barrister, told the inquest jury that for the officers' account to be right, the fatal entry wound would have had to be on the right front side of his head – not the rear left.

Even the crown prosecution service (CPS), which has so far declined to prosecute the officers and is now reconsidering the case, had concluded that the scientific evidence would enable any prosecutor to "disprove" aspects of the officers' accounts and that this "may lead a jury to conclude that the officers have lied about certain matters". However, it then concluded that the scientific evidence on its own did not disprove the officers' belief that they were in immediate danger. The inquest jury, having seen and heard all the witnesses and received careful directions on the law of self defence, clearly thought otherwise.

The fact that the case has taken five years already and is still hanging over the officers and the Stanley family is a matter of grave concern. But that was because the first inquest was a travesty conducted by the infamous Dr Stephen Chan (*Eyes passim*). Ordering a new inquest, high court judge Mr Justice Silber said that when there was a death caused by "agents of the state", there was duty on the coroner to "minimise the risk of future deaths, to give the beginnings of justice to the bereaved, and to assuage the anxieties of the public. A creditable accusation of murder or manslaughter by state agents will call for investigation of the utmost rigour conducted independently for all to see."

That is what has happened. And the fact that the police do not like the conclusions is no ground for changing the law. Officers who act in lawful self defence have nothing to fear from the legal process.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

You've been Asboed

THE anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) that the prime minister and home secretary promised would "target criminal and sub-criminal behaviour" to protect citizens in troubled neighbourhoods are turning out to be little more than flashy "new" Labour window-dressing.

According to probation officers and penal reform groups, the police, local authorities and courts are misusing Asbos by targeting vulnerable groups like the homeless, the mentally ill and young children who should receive care or treatment.

Napo, the probation union, is assembling a dossier highlighting the abuse of the orders which, it claims, are costly, unfair – and sometimes downright absurd.

Take the example of a Manchester prostitute and drug abuser who was "asboed" for causing a nuisance by accosting men in a certain area. One of the conditions of her Asbo was that she was forbidden from carrying condoms while in the area. Unfortunately, the drug clinic she attends is in the restricted area and one of its services is to provide free condoms as part of a sensible harm reduction strategy. The woman was then "breached" and criminalised for carrying condoms in her area.

In another case a teenager was made the subject of an Asbo which said he was not to congregate with more than three other youths. He was subsequently arrested for a breach of the order for attending a local youth club – a well-run place providing a valuable service to young people in his area. The night he was arrested the youth club was running a workshop on… anti-social behaviour.

Meanwhile, a homeless man was given an Asbo to stop him sleeping rough or begging, not aggressively but "in an earnest and humble way". And Manchester city council has also announced its plans to use Asbos to stop mobile soup kitchens (which feed up to 100 homeless people a night) from operating in the city centre because of the "mess" and "complaints".

The uncomfortable truth for Tony Blair and David Blunkett is that Asbos have come to be used for a wide variety of behaviour, much of which is legal. The penalties for breaching them are harsh, however — up to five years in jail; and one in five of the 2,650 people subject to an Asbo so far has ended up in prison at a time when the government claims it is trying to reduce the pressure on overcrowded jails. So far there is no evidence Asbos cut crime or affect offending rates.

ASYLUM

Hope snuffed out

ISRAFIL SHIRI, an Iranian who had failed in his attempt to seek asylum in Britain, walked into the offices of Refugee Action in Manchester, doused himself in petrol and set himself alight. As staff tried to put out the flames he shouted that he didn't want to die – but nor did he want to be sent back to Iran.

Two weeks ago the Manchester coroner Leonid Gorodkin recorded an open verdict on the 29 year old, saying: "The intentions of Israfil Shiri were an act of a desperate man who couldn't go back to Iran and was not able to stay here."

The desperate Shiri is just one of at least 14 asylum seekers who have killed themselves in the last three years in Britain rather than return to the countries from which they had fled. Earlier this year a Yorkshire coroner condemned as "reprehensible" the case in which another Iranian, Sirous Khajehb, had been wrongly told his asylum claim had been turned down. He hanged himself rather than return to Iran where he feared imprisonment, torture or death.

Shiri was a member of the Iranian religious police who fled his country when the authorities there discovered he was gay. In Iran, homosexuality is punishable by execution.

Shiri arrived in the UK in the back of a truck in August 2001 and immediately claimed asylum. Despite the increase in state executions in Iran, his initial application was rejected for "lack of evidence". Unable to find a specialist lawyer to represent him on appeal, that too was turned down in November 2002. Within days the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) withdrew its support and ordered his eviction. Homeless, denied benefits and the right to work, he became destitute.

The inquest heard that Shiri would sometimes stay with friends – or would sleep in wheelie bins in the streets. Because he had a gut disease which rendered him liable to vomiting and bleeding, his only hope was to persuade the authorities that he was too ill to be sent back; but because he had no address he was unable to obtain access to doctor.

Kamran Adib Qudis, a friend and former neighbour, described how Shiri's health deteriorated once he was living on the streets. He depended on friends, charities and refugee support groups. Finally, on 28 August last year, Shiri met Natalie Underwood at the offices of Refugee Action. According to Ms Underwood, Shiri discussed his medical condition and his fears of deportation but appeared calm. He shook her hand at the end of the interview and promised to come back the following day. But he returned a few minutes later doused in a flammable liquid and with two flicks of a cigarette lighter set himself alight. He died on 3 September in Manchester's Wythenshawe hospital after suffering 78 percent burns.

In recording his open verdict, the coroner said he could not be sure Shiri intended to kill himself.

MAPELEY STEPS

PAC it in

IF THE new chairman of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), David Varney, was in any doubt about the mess he inherited from former Revenue boss Sir Nicholas Montagu earlier this year, he will have no illusions following his appearance before the Commons public accounts committee (PAC) last month to answer questions on the national audit office (NAO) report on the STEPS deal.

Following revelations about the scale of the potential over-spend on the contract that saw the country's tax offices flogged off to the Bermudan company Mapeley STEPS Ltd in 2001, committee members were in tenacious mood.

Tory chairman Edward Leigh (pictured right) quickly got Mr Varney to admit what his predecessor would not – that the sale to a tax haven company was a terrific mistake and that, yes, this was a "tax shelter" (otherwise known as a tax avoidance scheme). Varney's colleague and fellow HMRC board member Helen Ghosh, however, inexplicably stuck to Montagu's long-discredited line that the Revenue had no right, under European law, to question the offshore structure. Alarmingly, Ms Ghosh, as head of HMRC's "corporate services", will be responsible for any future private finance initiative (PFI) deals the department signs.

After cataloguing numerous problems familiar to any student of PFIs – from the mundane, such as lack of access for visitors to the buildings, to the more serious iniquity of a "two tier" workforce that the deal has introduced – the committee's attention turned to money. Hemsworth Labour MP Jon Trickett wanted to know why the first three years' payments were so much higher than the £170m predicted for the contract and accepted by the NAO in its May report. David Varney offered no explanation other than to say that the £170m was an average and the annual payment could go down. On the other hand, it could go up.

"Could you give us an estimate as to what the total value of the contract will be then?" asked Tricket. "No, I cannot," came the strikingly honest reply from Varney – even though Mapeley had won the contract on the strength of a rather precise estimate that the STEPS deal would cost £1.427bn at 2001 prices. It was left to Mapeley chief executive Jamie Hopkins to shed what little light there was on the issue. It all depended, he explained, on what extra business the government gave to Mapeley above that accounted for in the £170m basic price – though neither he nor the government officials gave any indication of what, if any, services had been provided for the £75m per year extra that the *Eye* showed was being shelled out for the basic "facility payment" in each of the first three years.

Mr Hopkins knew a bit more about the financial problems that led Mapeley to come back to the government, cap in hand, just seven months after signing the contract. Questioned by Durham Labour MP Gerry Steinberg, he explained that things were so bad at the time that Mapeley had asked for an extra £27m per year, easily taking the cost of the deal above the "public sector comparator", ie the cost of leaving the buildings in the public sector, and making it more expensive than the rival bids.

Norfolk Tory MP Richard Bacon immediately saw the significance of this and put to Mr Hopkins the possibility that Mapeley had under-priced its bid in order to win the deal, only to come back for more as soon as the ink on the contract was dry: "That is why [your bid] was so cheap and therefore you had to go back to the government for more money. You asked them for a one-off payment but it was not made. That is all correct, is it not?"

Hopkins's response to this devastating accusation was one word: "Correct".

Not surprisingly the committee was anxious to know more about Mapeley's parlous finances. Jamie Hopkins assured Labour MP Jim Sheridan that the company was financially secure even though negotiations with the government for more money have been rumbling on for three years. David Varney told the committee that the talks would be over by April and that, even if Mapeley went bust, there was a plan B. Pressed on what that plan was, the erstwhile captain of industry showed how quickly he is adapting to life as a mandarin by replying: "I would rather provide that, if I may, as a private answer to committee". His request was granted and thus, in the finest traditions of PFI, the finances of a major owner of public assets (tucked away in Bermuda with no need to publish accounts) and the risks to those assets remain a closely-guarded secret.

OUTSOURCING

It's criminal, Crapita

"WE have not screwed up at all in the last six months. We are meeting or exceeding all the service targets. We have not been fined for anything."

So boasted Capita chief executive Paul Pindar in July when announcing record profits and seeking to draw a line under scandals such as the firm's disastrous handling of the criminal records bureau (CRB). *Whoops!* Three months later and things are back to normal at Crapita.

The financial services authority (FSA) has just fined one of its companies, Capita Trust Company, £300,000 for mis-selling high income (and very high risk) "precipice bonds" to 500 customers who didn't understand them and ended up losing £3.5m. The company was previously Royal and Sun Alliance Trust, until Capita bought it from the insurance company in 2001 as a first move into the lucrative financial services business and continued the mis-selling for a further 15 months.

Then more bad news from Crapita's murky past arrived in the form of the public accounts committee (PAC) report into the CRB. The committee found that, although Capita won the CRB contract in 2002 with a bid that was £100m cheaper than its rivals, it will end up costing more than the alternatives would have done, largely because of failures to understand how the system would operate.

Two years after being set up, the PAC found the criminal records bureau "is not yet providing the standard or range of service originally envisaged". None of this bodes well for one of the government's most eagerly awaited initiatives, the child trust fund. It might be hoped that this would be put in the hands of an organisation that could be trusted with money. The Children's Mutual, one of the main providers of the government-backed funds, has however awarded the contract to administer its scheme "end to end" to, you've guessed it… Crapita.

PFI NEWS

ACCAdemic interest

ONE organisation with no interest in running down the private finance initiative (PFI) is the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

Yet a report commissioned by ACCA from Manchester University and delivered at its conference on 3 November to an audience including officials from the national audit office (NAO) and Norman Lamb, of the Commons treasury select committee, finds the PFI to be an abject failure when it comes to value for money and accountability.

The report looks in detail at 21 road and hospital projects and confirms that PFIs have enormous borrowing costs compared to standard public sector borrowing; huge premiums, around 30 percent, are paid to ensure construction "on budget" (well above historic rates of cost over-runs); payments under PFI contracts generally rise dramatically above expected levels shortly after the deals are signed; and the PFI companies make massive profits from the deals, with the main beneficiaries being… the financiers! As a result, significantly more NHS hospital trusts with PFI commitments are in deficit than the national average.

The authors are quite uncompromising: "In the case of roads [PFI] has created additional costs and risks to the public agency, and to the public sector as a whole, through tax concessions that must increase costs to the taxpayer and/or reduce service provision. In the case of hospitals, PFI has generated extra costs to hospital users, both staff and patients, and to the Treasury."

When it comes to accountability, the report concludes that "financial information about PFI is opaque, partly because of government-imposed confidentiality." And, while the main rationale of PFI is the transfer of certain risks to the private sector, it is invariably unclear exactly where the risks of projects lie. Much of the problem is caused by the desire of both the private and public sectors to treat PFI projects as "off balance sheet" – the companies so they can get tax breaks, the public sector so it appears to have less debt. The result is extra costs and uncertainty over who is responsible when things go wrong.

As independent evidence mounts that PFI is little more than an expensive accounting scam, why won't the government conduct a review of its own? Could it be because such a review would find that a large proportion of the government's £105bn future PFI commitments should be treated as government borrowing? Recognising such liabilities would more honestly show how much of the government's spending programme is on tick, to be paid for by future generations of taxpayers. But it would blow apart Gordon's golden rule and his economic legacy… so don't expect a rethink any time soon.

OPEN SPACES

The right to moan

THOSE fighting to keep public access to the country's diminishing commonland have lost a legal battle to hold a public inquiry into plans to fence-in part of Wisley Common in Surrey.

Three recent public inquiries have thwarted attempts by English Nature and others to fence-in public commons for "conservation grazing" in other parts of the country; and the Open Spaces Society and the Defend Our Commons Campaign were confident their arguments would prevail on legal and ecological grounds for historic Wisley. But environment secretary Margaret Beckett refused an inquiry and approved Wisley's enclosure.

Open Spaces Society

The Open Spaces Society had argued that under the 1925 law of property act the department for environment, food and rural affairs (Defra) was not entitled to give consent over common land without first calling a local inquiry. But Mr Justice Collins said that would lead to "the absurd situation" that every application, however minor, would have to be considered at a public inquiry, even if everyone agreed to the changes.

The Open Spaces Society is likely to appeal, fearing that the ruling will lead to enclosure of other commons – even when there is widespread opposition as at Wisley.

In the City

AS THE end of Ramadan approaches a swirl of extraordinary rumours emanate from Dubai, suggesting that a large black hole has been discovered by the ministry of finance. Sums of up to $500m are mentioned.

Unauthorised payments or loans are said to have been made over a period of at least two years without detection. And there are said to have been a number of unpublicised arrests. All of this remains speculation. Meanwhile, official activity has been largely on hold in the Gulf emirate in recent weeks: not just because of Ramadan but also because of the death of Sheikh Zaid, ruler of Abu Dhabi, Dubai's rival for prominence in the United Arab Emirates.

These rumours have no connection (other than an unfortunate coincidence of timing) with another embarrassment for the oil-rich emirate – the scandal surrounding the Buhaleeba brothers, close associates of Dubai's ruling Maktoum family. The entire stable of more than 20 horses previously raced in Britain and Dubai in the colours of two of the four Buhaleeba brothers – who have interests in construction and property – were suddenly last month transferred into the control of the Dubai ruler Sheikh Maktoum al-Maktoum's Gainsborough Stud. The horses were previously leased from the Maktoums by the Buhaleeba brothers.

Some will be sold and the more fancied now race under the Maktoum colours. The Buhaleeba brothers had built up a big racing presence in Britain since 2002. The reason for this sudden switch and their racing demise is said to be the massive gambling losses made by Ahmed Buhaleeba at the roulette tables in London casinos, particularly the Barclay brothers-owned Ritz. Buhaleeba is said to have lost more than £25m, including £4m in one evening while playing three tables simultaneously. Such flagrant and embarrassing behaviour does not go down well in Dubai. However, given that Ahmed Buhaleeba's losses were not publicly known in London, never mind Dubai, this loss of favour by the entire family has puzzled local observers.

All of this follows the row over the proposed new Dubai International Financial Centre which saw the summary dismissal in June of its two chief proposed regulators, Ian Hay Davison, late of Lloyd's, and Philip Thorne, late of the financial services authority (FSA). Both had been hired in 2002 to be chairman and chief executive of the Dubai financial services authority by Sheikh Mohammed al-Maktoum, the crown prince and most influential figure in Dubai. Their views on transparency had not gone down well with local business figures closer to the ruling family who had negotiated profitable property deals as part of the development of the financial centre.

Dubai is in sore need of polishing its financial reputation post 9/11. It is still seen as one of the main centres in the world for laundering money. The Americans have been putting pressure on the local authorities and banks to clean up their financial act. It would seem this may still have some way to go.

PS: Sheikh Mohammed's former business manager until 2001, John Leat, is now cosied up with Andrew Regan in the Co-Op corrupter's comeback vehicle, Corvus Capital. Regan purchased a stake in Corvus where Leat was a non-executive director in September. While Leat was running the Maktoum racing interests, it emerged that employees regularly received large cash bonuses and other perks tax free. Not surprisingly these matters are said to have attracted the interest of the Inland Revenue.

ONE of the late Sheikh Zaid's most costly mistakes was his backing of the Bank of Cocaine and Conmen International. Another former fan of BCCI is Howard Palmer, who today runs courses advising bankers how to avoid becoming victims of trading finance fraud.

He and his banking academy were given a fulsome write-up by the *Daily Torygraph* in September. Sadly the article did not have space to contain a mention of the eulogy Palmer provided in his 1989 book on banking, written after he worked at BCCI, to its founder and chief crook, Agha Hasan Abedi. The man who knew all about bank fraud (having presided over the largest one in history) was described by Palmer as "the banking and management legend it has been my privilege to have known and been inspired by". Less than two years later BCCI collapsed. Abedi by then had fled to Pakistan where he died. There is nothing like learning about fraud at the feet of a master.

THE multiple investigations – nine at the last count, mostly in the US – into Saddam Hussein's exploitation of the United Nations-run Iraq oil-for-food programme are looking closely at all those recorded as having received and traded Iraqi oil.

The American investigations focus particularly on those US companies or individuals who opposed sanctions, as well as companies with links to Russia and France, both of which opposed attempts to investigate the running of the programme after suspicions emerged that it was benefiting Saddam more than the Iraqi people. It is now believed that Saddam and his cronies generated almost $2bn in "kickbacks" by way of hidden surcharges on imports of food and medicines, as well as oil exports.

Among the Iraqi oil shipments in which American investigators are said to be interested are those handled by two Swiss companies – Western Petroleum and Taurus Petroleum. Both, particularly Taurus, are closely linked to an American oil trader, Ben Pollner, who has denied any wrongdoing and insists all his deals were legal. Both companies traded oil for a number of years on behalf of Lukoil, the Russian oil giant. And both shared an address in London's Prince's Gate in Knightsbridge.

Interestingly that same address was listed for the telephone number of the London representative of a Liechtenstein company, Fenar Petroleum, which was also awarded Iraqi oil cargoes including on behalf of a member of Abu Dhabi's ruling al-Nahayan family, according to the Iraq Survey Group's report into the oil-for-food scam. Also based in London at the same Knightsbridge address is the Algerian national oil company which also received Iraqi oil.

The ISG report clearly shows that preferential shipments were provided to those individuals and governments who were sympathetic to Saddam. It also estimated Saddam earned almost $230m on "kickbacks" for oil exports alone through the payment of unauthorised surcharges between 2000 and 2003. So far Britain, whose representatives tried to force the UN to stop the scam, has not disclosed whether it is investigating what role companies in London may have played in trading Iraqi oil. Ironically much of that Iraqi oil ended up in American cars.

THOSE with knowledge of Sebastian Sainsbury's City career are more amused than mystified by his appearance as the British frontman for a proposed £25m-plus takeover of debt-laden Leeds United, relegated from the premiership last season.

Sainsbury has for two weeks been promising the imminent arrival of up to $50m from

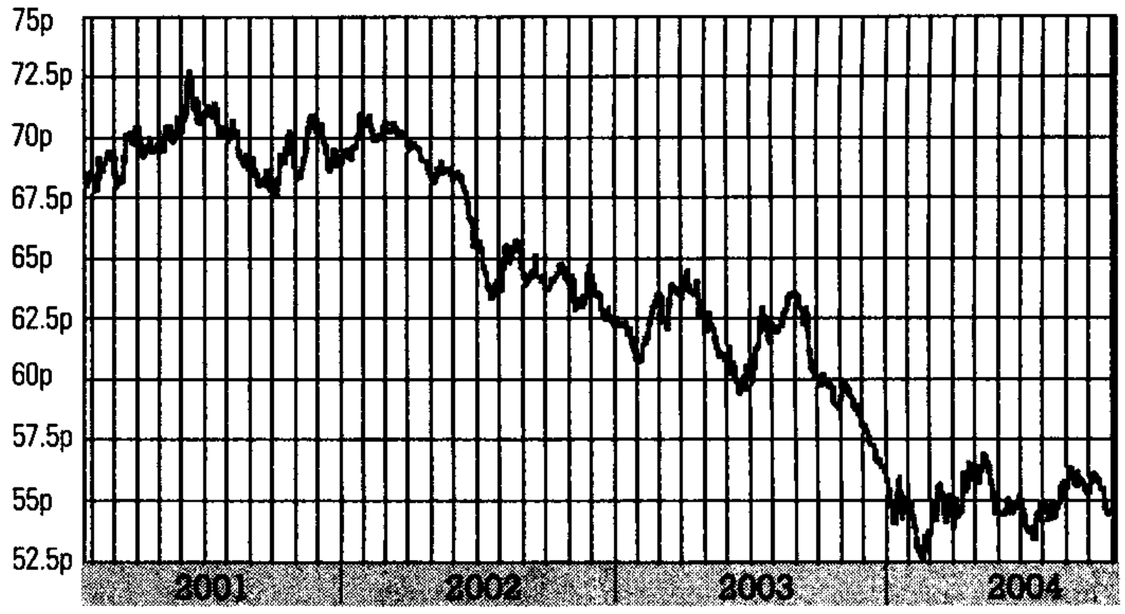
Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Source: University of British Columbia

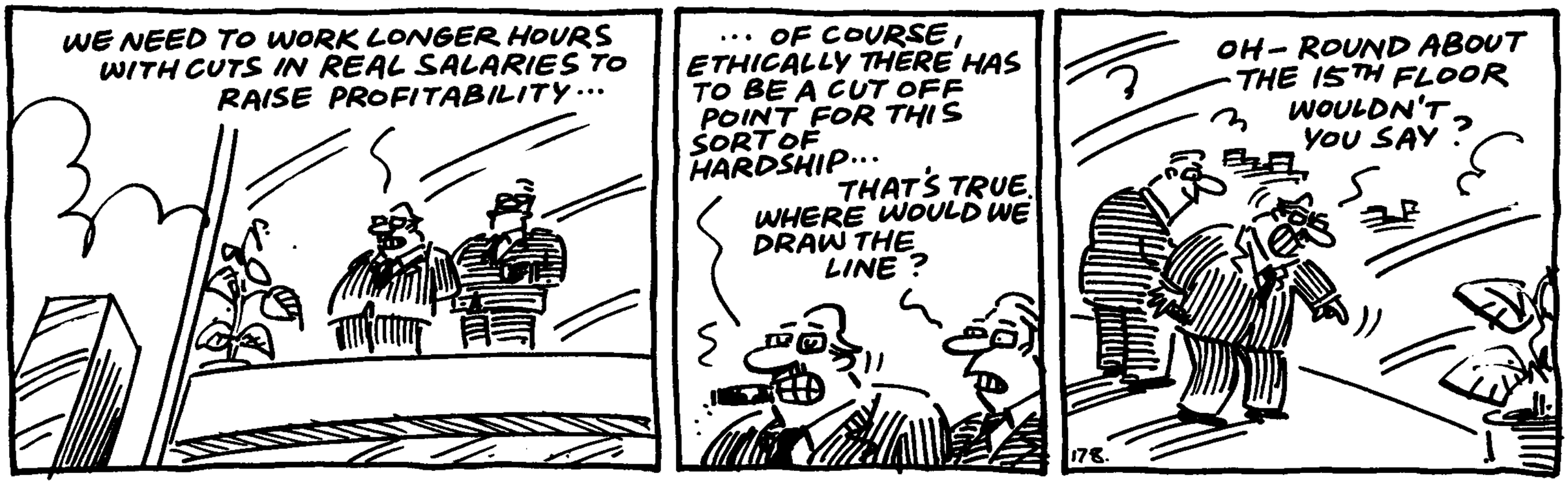
The almighty dollar... meets the Bush administation

Daily Exchange Rates: British Pounds per U.S. Dollar



THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


WE NEED TO WORK LONGER HOURS WITH CUTS IN REAL SALARIES TO RAISE PROFITABILITY...
... OF COURSE, ETHICALLY THERE HAS TO BE A CUT OFF POINT FOR THIS SORT OF HARDSHIP...
THAT'S TRUE. WHERE WOULD WE DRAW THE LINE?
OH - ROUND ABOUT THE 15TH FLOOR WOULDN'T YOU SAY?
178.

American investors sailing under the name of Nova Financial Partners from Tampa, Florida. There has been much talk by Sainsbury of the money being in US bank accounts and earmarked for the Leeds deal, but so far it has not crossed the Atlantic.

Instead the best that Sainsbury – who hails from the less wealthy side of the supermarket family – could say last week was that his American partners had produced "the first of a number of documents showing that we have the funds in place". The Leeds directors not surprisingly remain sceptical.

That scepticism may in part be due to the involvement with Nova of one Burl Sheppard and the coincidence that a businessman of the same name was a defendant in a US civil action which resulted in an $8.25m judgment for breach of contract being made by a Salt Lake City court in 2001. That Burl Sheppard was one of the defendants along with WorldNet and WorldNova. He was then living in Tennessee. Summary judgment was given against all the defendants. The plaintiffs, a company called Starways, have since tried to enforce the judgment in Texas. Starways had previously brought claims for $250m and $18m against WorldNet and another company linked to Sheppard, Universal TelTech. These claims were discontinued before the third case was commenced in 1998.

That Burl Sheppard is now said to be linked to a group of Tampa-based companies offering high-yield investment opportunities through trading programmes involving bank guarantees. Say no more. No doubt there is no connection between that Burl Sheppard and the Burl Sheppard who is offering to take over the first division football side. And that promised $50m will be forthcoming.

LORD BURNS is chairman of the now Spanish-owned Abbey National banking group – a deal he wholly supported. Burns is also a director of Pearson, owners of the *Financial Times*. Pearson also owns the Spanish publishing group Recoletos, owners of the main business title, *Expansion*, and other publications. A director of Recoletos is related to Emilio Botin, the man who runs Abbey's new owner, Banco Santander, and a controversial figure in Spain because of his unusual approach to corporate governance.

However, Spanish readers of the Pearson-owned titles say that until recently very little critical of Botin was to be found in those publications. What a surprise. Hopefully any future criticism of Abbey or its new owners will not be equally muted.

THE recent death of Lord Hanson produced a predictable outpouring of appreciation for his role as one of the Thatcherite icons of British industry. But no mention was made of his role in starting the process which has played no small part in the pension crisis that now grips British companies.

It was ace asset-stripper Hanson who first spotted the opportunities presented by the cash rich, over-funded pension funds of the companies he took over. Twice he was thwarted by the courts in bids to access the pension surpluses of first Courage (£80m in 1986) and then Imperial Tobacco (£130m in 1990). Others soon followed more successfully leading to the raiding of surpluses and taking of pension holidays which, once the stock market boom ended in 2000, largely resulted in the multi-billion pound deficit now faced by occupational pension schemes.

The plaudits also mainly overlooked the fact that while Hanson and his many imitators made money for shareholders, they created little of lasting value for British manufacturing industry. Hanson and the others were always all about share price value, not asset value. Which is why, like his still surviving mentor, the original asset stripper Jim Slater, and his contemporary and fellow member of the tainted Wilson honours list, James Goldsmith, their one-time great business empires of the 70s and 80s have already largely vanished leaving behind little or no lasting legacy.

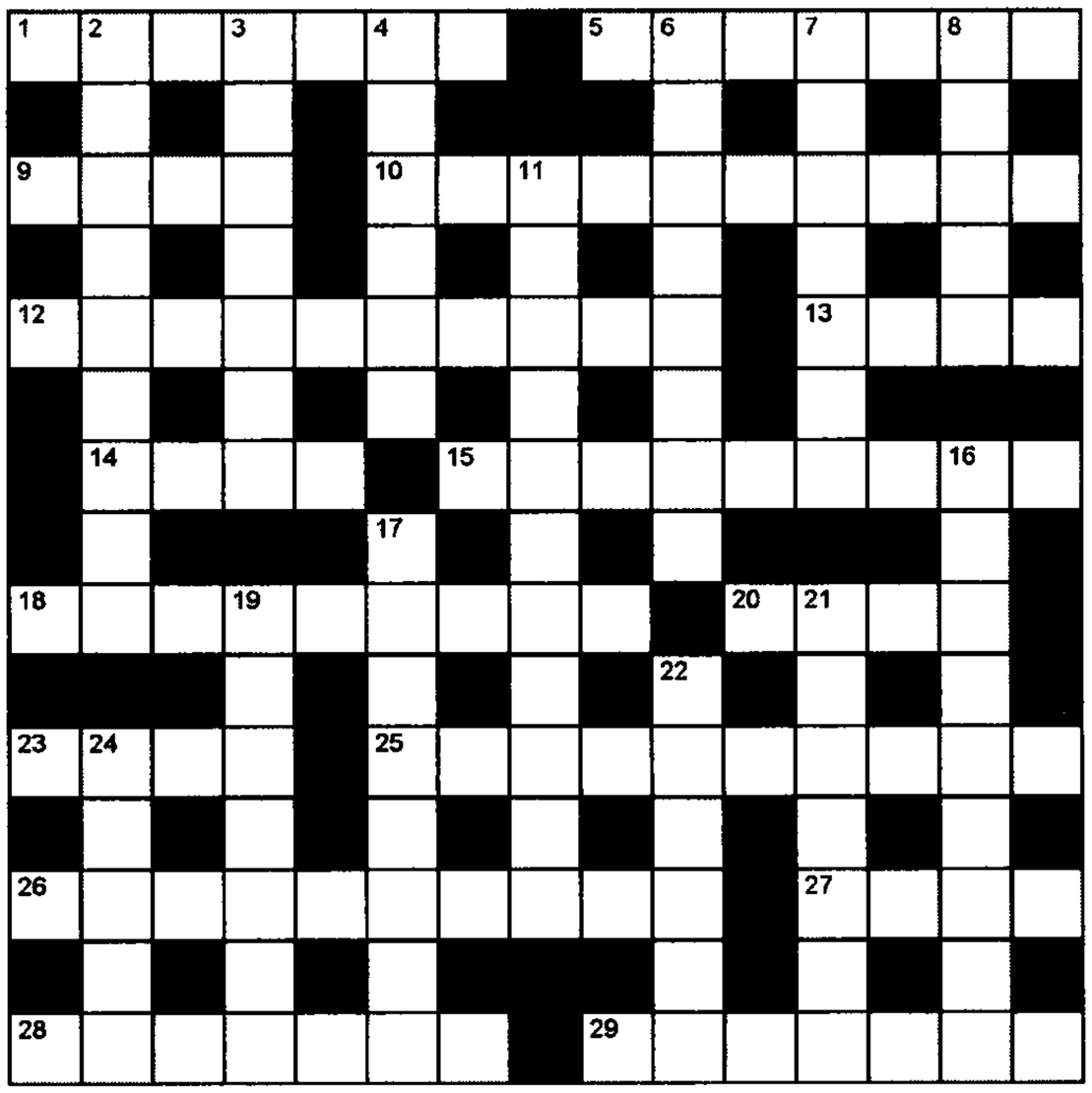
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 274

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 19 November2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/15 Rear stimulation gives a thrill to hacks briefly. Article? Pass (1,4,2,3,6)
5 Having trouble giving a blow job, being a joker? (7)
9/21 Put pipe down before sex goes on: life isn't a bed of roses (4,7)
10 Pledges to go in for bondage during foreign cruises (10)
12 Liz dancing in her underwear – crazy, they're liable to get crushed (6,4)
13 Privileged American giving head to William "the Snake" (4)
14 Potty character, name of Tony (4)
15 See 1
18 London district gives Cyclops support for member, quite a heavyweight (9)
20 Nick, the Westminster bully-boy (4)
23 Horny beast of a city type who's in and out quickly? (4)
25 Bunny's poser: was Dutch cap's end knotted without ring? (5,2,3)
26 Labour needs one dodgy ticket-seller to get through a bad time (5,2,3)
27 Test drug flipped Clifford (4)
28 Bully inserts length between tits on Brenda (7)
29 Reportedly commits foul on Eastender in our underperforming football club (7)

DOWN

2 Chancellor, once Blair's flipped and kicked out Left "cabbages" (9)
3 Awfully nice to squeeze up pimple of Londoner? (7)
4 Bush at heart accepts the point: past it and still on the shelf (6)
6 Klosters entertainment "a pisser," snapped King coming in (5-3)
7 Piss off a wet involved in homosexual environment (3,4)
8 Gets hands on dough, say ... is not satisfied (5)
11 Conservative that hurt King Edward, the layabout (5,6)
16 MI6's role given abnormal powers with no one up on time (9)
17 Say, at the end of snog with singer Barry. "It's liable to get into a froth"? (3,5)
19 Ed once accepted sheep should get good stuffing (7)
21 See 9 Across
22 Fly Tony's debut fixed for Home Counties (6)
24 Loser's throw-away line after model duck weekend (5)

Crossword 273 winner: ELIZABETH HALL

ACROSS: 1 Appendix 5 Asthma 10/16 Trust me I'm a doctor 11 Unarmed 12 Shambolic 14 Sable 17 Stressful 19 Judas 21/13 Embonpoint 22 Alcoholic 25 Bon Jovi 26 Washtub 27 Des res 28 Drenched.

DOWN: 1 Artists 2 Paula 3 Notable 4 Ideal 6 Shampoo 7 Hamfisted 8 Auditor 9 Pub crawl 15 Bare bones 16 Infra dig 17 Seedbed 18 San Jose 19 Johnson 20 Sickbed 23 Cower 24 Latch.

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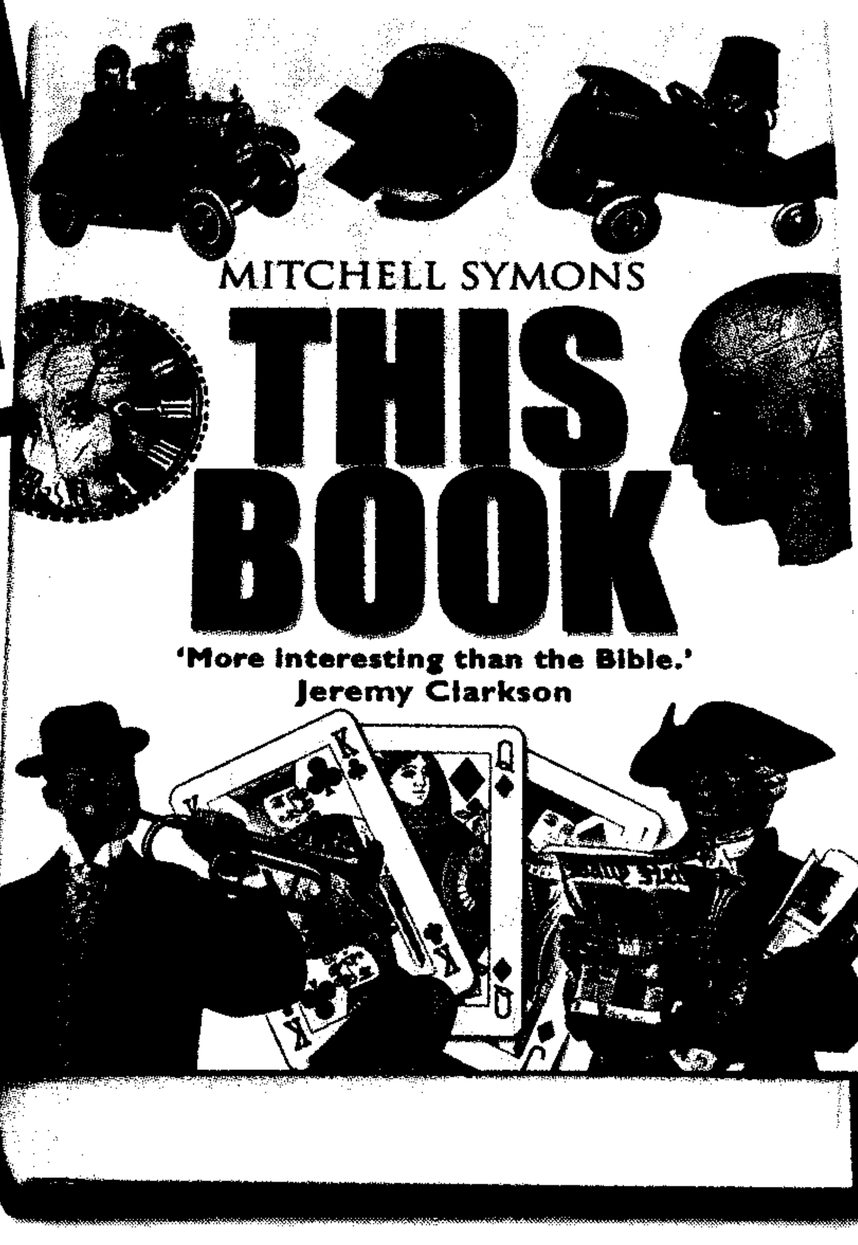

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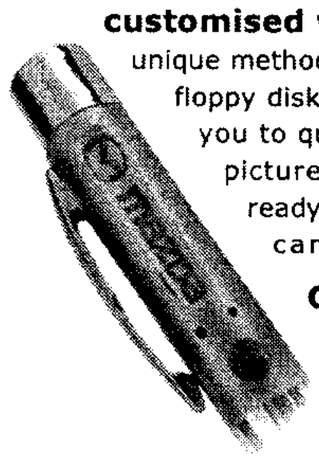

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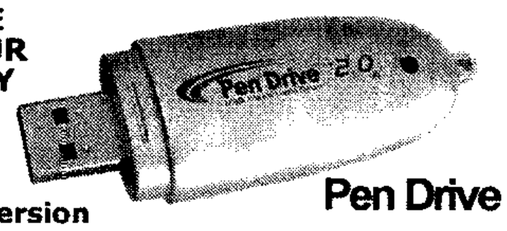

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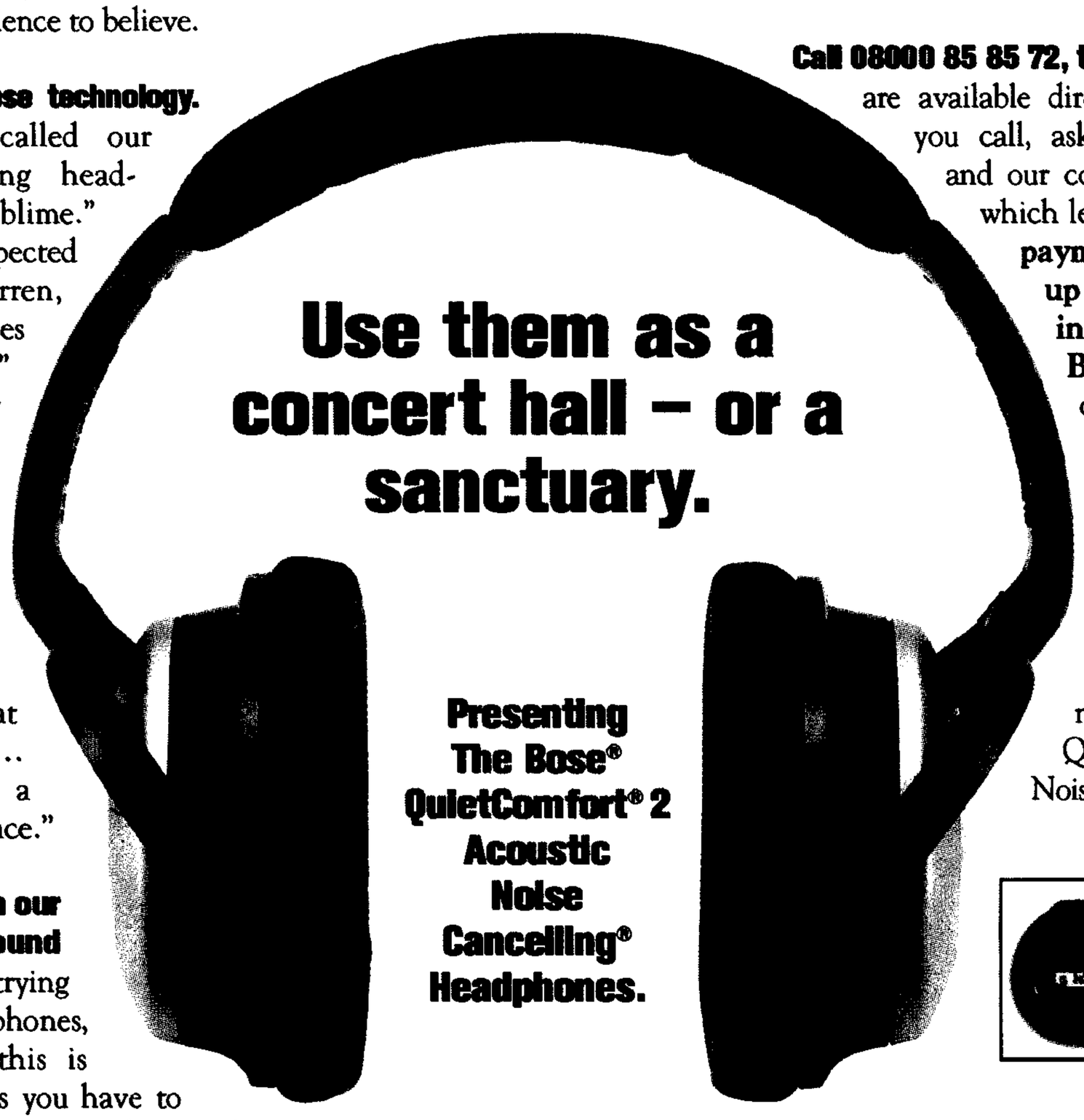

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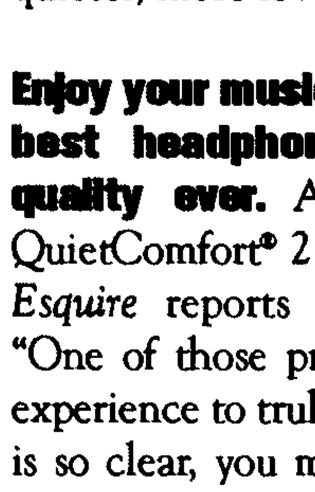

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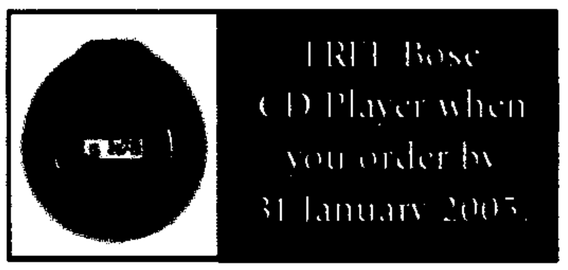

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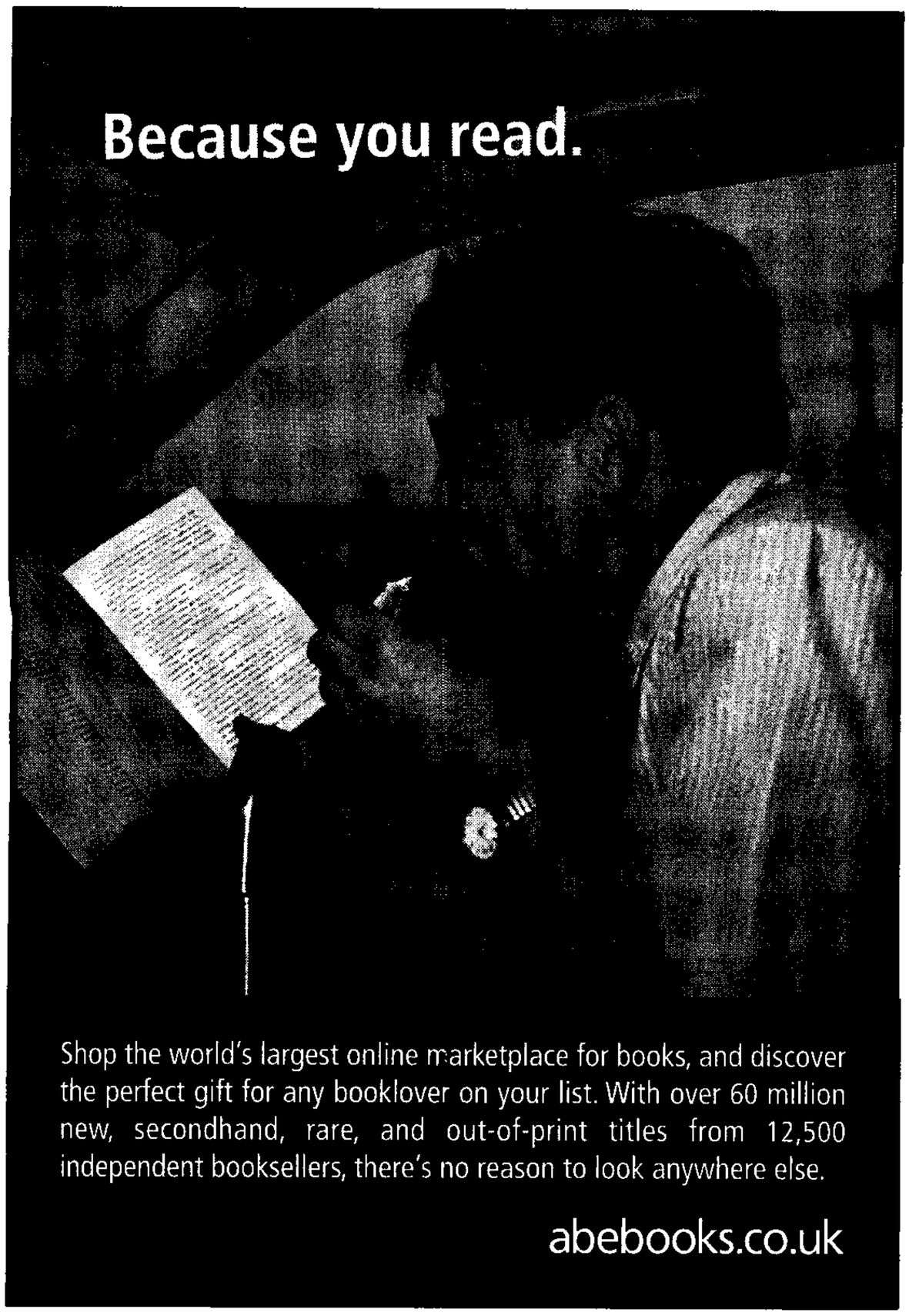
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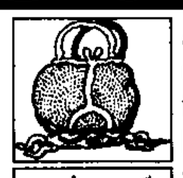

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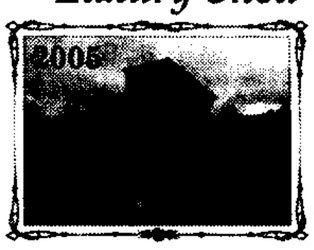

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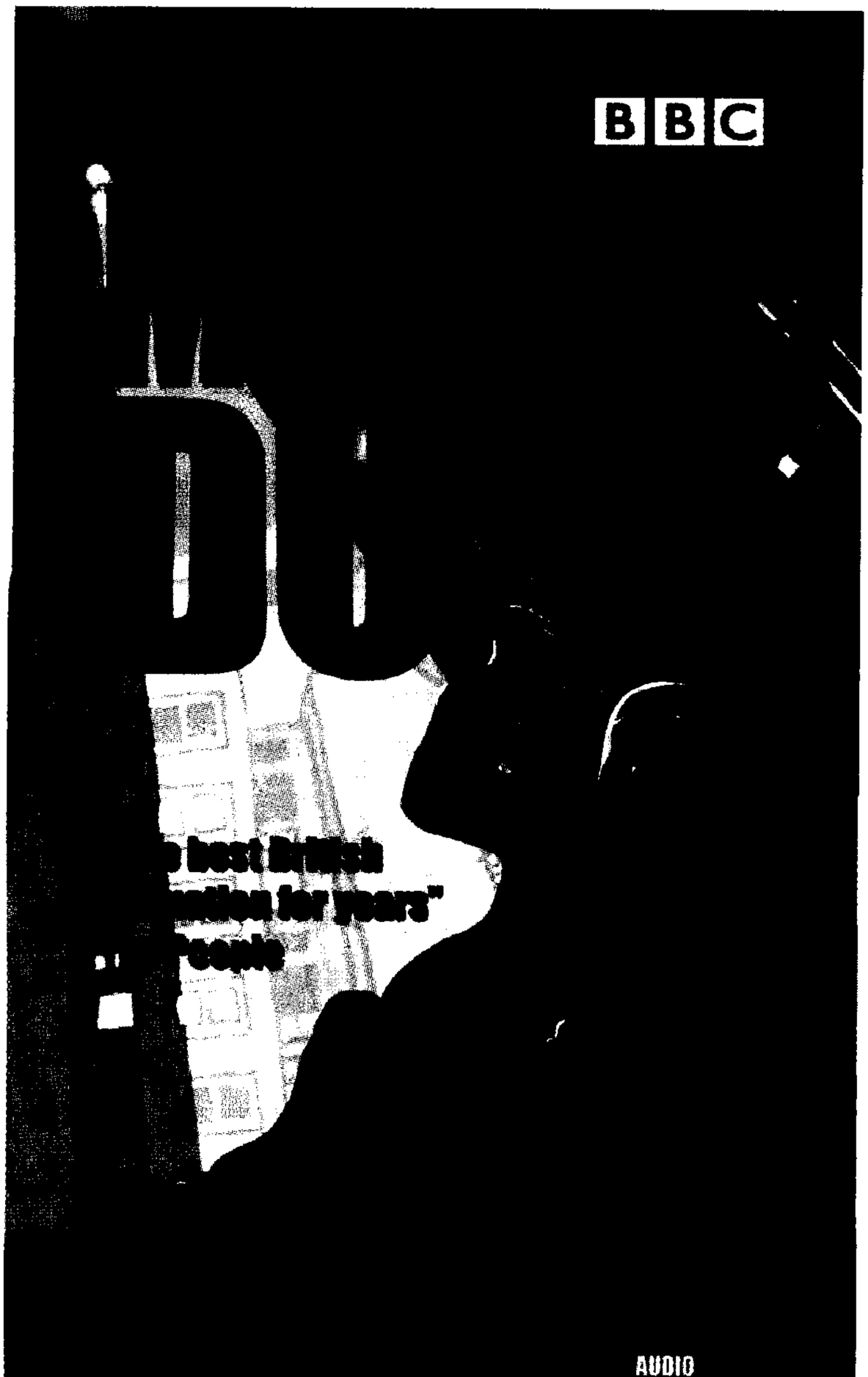

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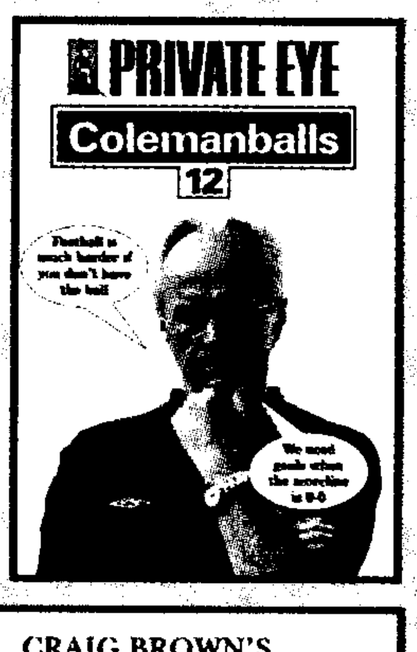

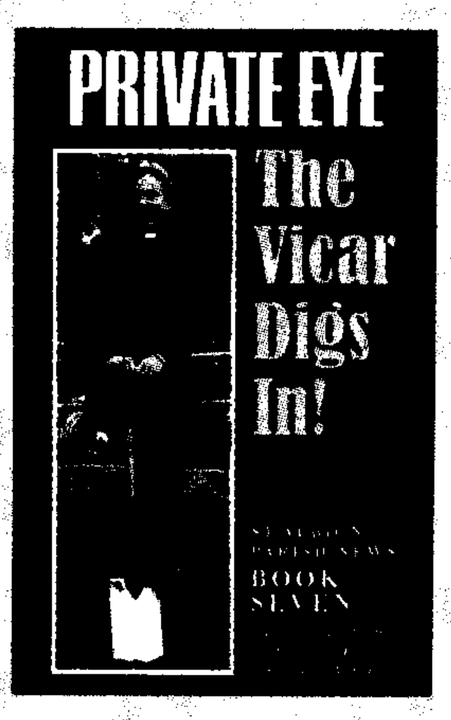

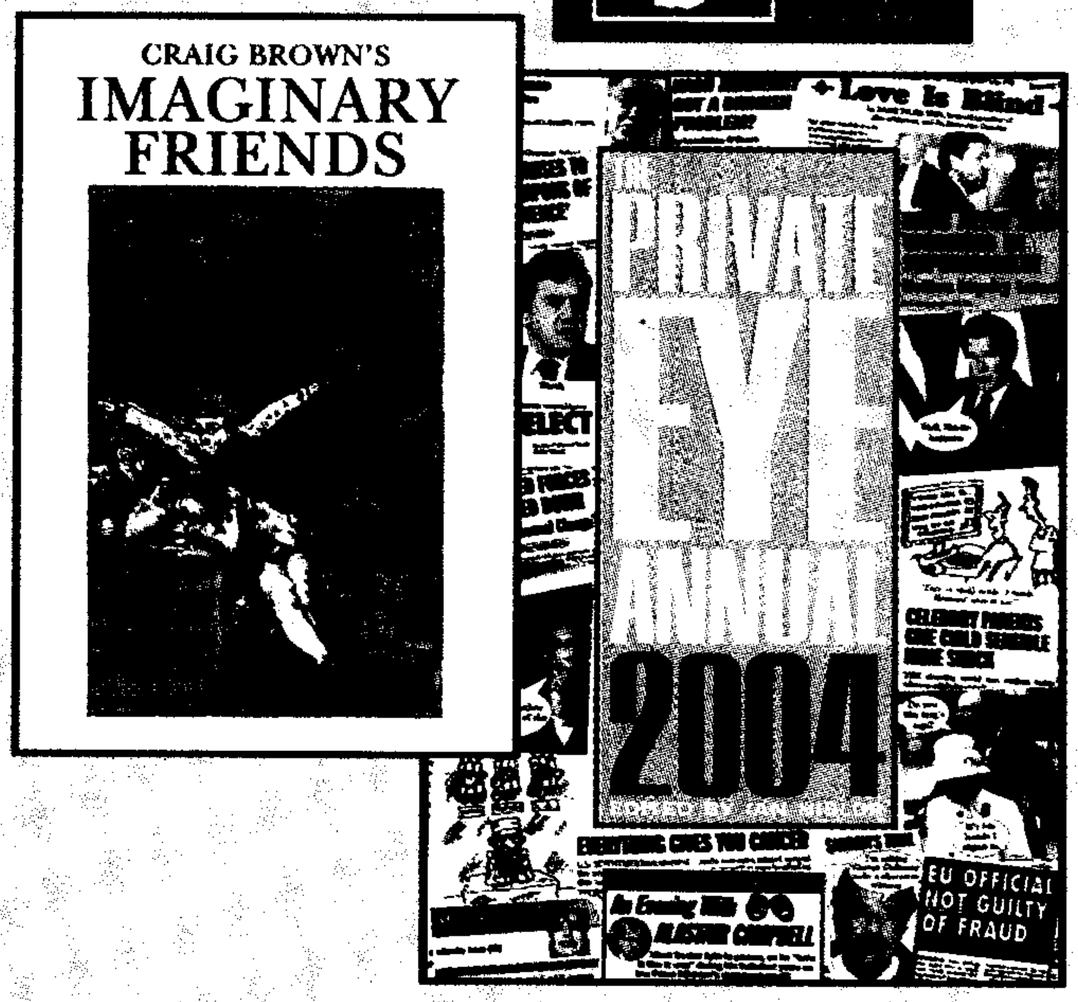

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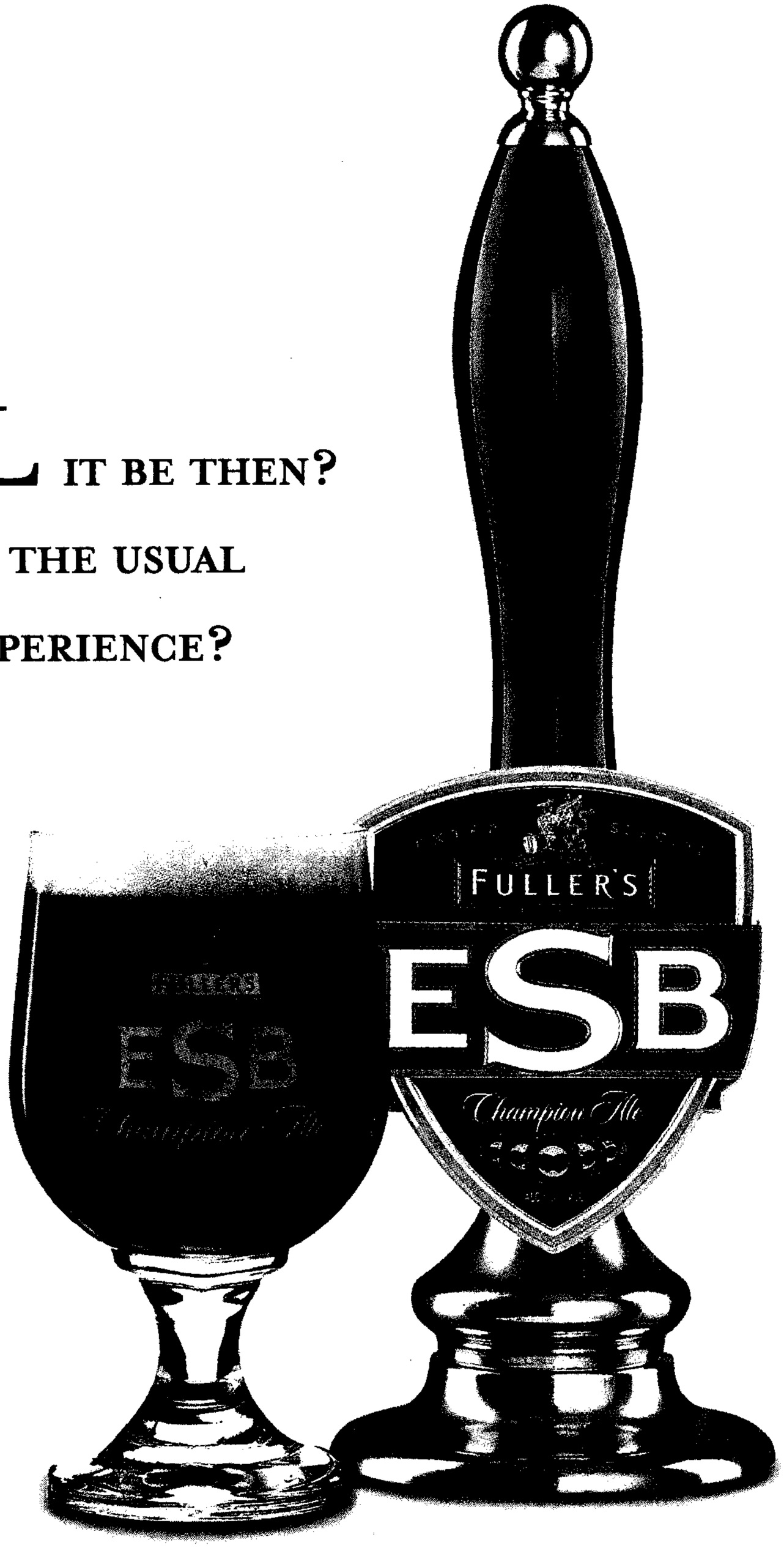

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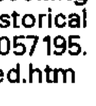

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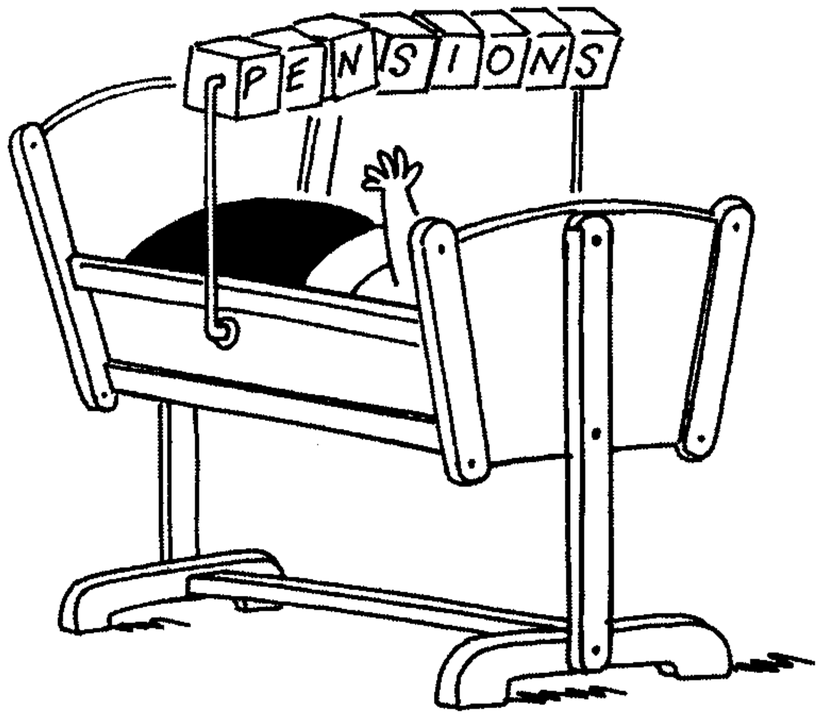

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